



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

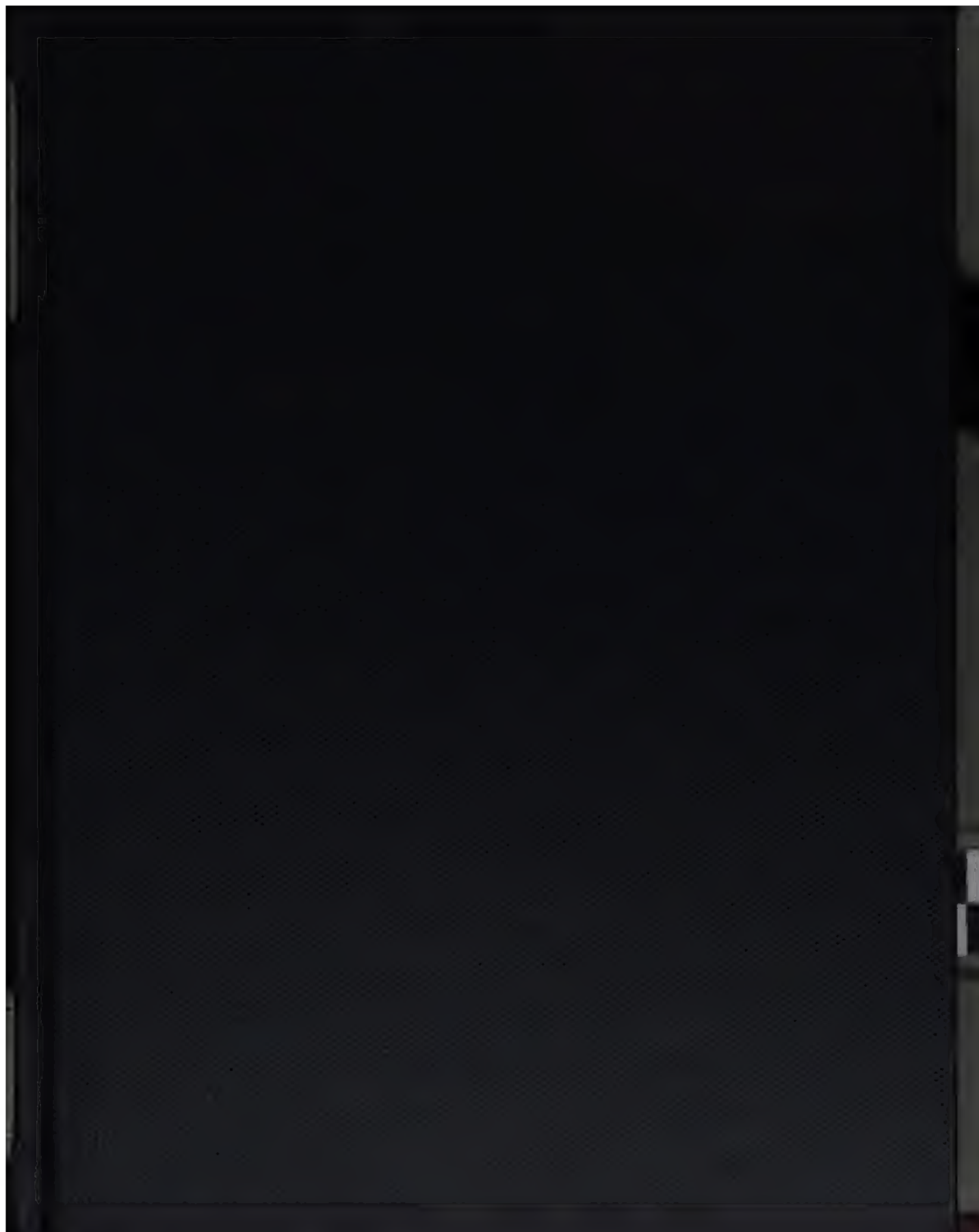
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

**“ Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan.”**

— GOETHE.

**“ There is no life of a man, faithfully recorded, but is a
heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed.”**

— CARLYLE.

**“ Goethe’s heart, which few knew, was as great as his
intellect, which all knew.”**

— JUNG STILLING.

**“ Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,
And each withdraws from, and repels its brother.
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;
The other strongly sweeps, this dust above,
Into the high ancestral spaces.”**

— FAUST (*Bayard Taylor’s translation*).



CHARLOTTE.
Frontispiece. See p. 108.



GOETHE

And His Woman Friends

BY
MARY CAROLINE CRAWFORD

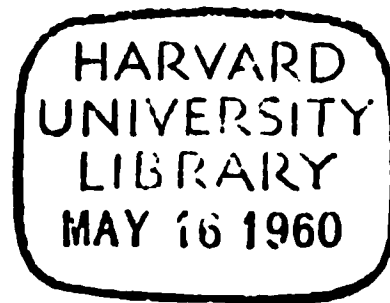
AUTHOR OF "OLD BOSTON DAYS AND WAYS,"
"ROMANTIC DAYS IN OLD BOSTON," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1911

47592.24.25

~~47592.24.25~~



Copyright, 1911,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

—
All rights reserved

Published, October, 1911

**Electrotyped and Printed by
THE COLONIAL PRESS
C. H. Simonds & Co., Boston, U.S.A.**

FOREWORD

HARDLY any great man in all literary history has been abused with such malignity as Goethe. There is scarcely a crime in the category of which he has not been accused — and proved guilty, too, — by ingenious citations from his life or his works! Remorseless is among the gentlest adjectives hurled at his head by virtuous critics who are wont, then, to refer to the various women with whom his career is bound up as so many sucked oranges from which he had taken all the sweetness that was in them as he passed triumphantly upon his ruthless way.

When, however, one searches for the fact-foundation of these Philippics one finds it to lie — in the poet's own words! His works, he declared, constituted one great confession in which nothing was concealed and very little extenuated. But Goethe was a *poet* and so could scarcely have been expected to Boswellize his life; even the one volume we regard as autobiography confesses itself *Dichtung* as well as *Wahrheit*.

It has, therefore, seemed to me worth while, in the following pages, to set forth the *facts* about Goethe and the women he knew rather than any-

FOREWORD

body's (even his!) interpretation of the facts. Here was a man of such overflowing lovingness and such extraordinary personal magnetism that all who knew him surrendered to his charm. The world was certainly his oyster if he had but chosen so to regard it. He did not so choose. Even the period of youthful wild oats was a very short one with him. For, quite early, he came to feel that he meant something to the world; and, like every gifted man who governs his life in the consciousness of his worth, he had the appearance of being selfishly egoistic. He could not help loving but since he preferred to be passively hampered by a wounded heart rather than actively hampered by a superfluous wife he loved and rode away. Goethe is the only exemplar the world possesses of a career devoted exclusively and consciously to self-development and for that reason we have no standard by which to judge his egoism. So, being baffled by it, we commonly call it by far worse names than it deserves. The self-indulgence of a young Faust we could understand but the self-restraint and self-flagellation of a Goethe who leaves his Frederica because he thinks renouncement of her necessary to his highest development is a character beyond the comprehension of most of us and therefore calls forth our abuse.

The truth is, however, that Goethe, far from being

FOREWORD

a bad man, was an astonishingly good man, judged by the moral standards of his own time. In a Weimar whose atmosphere was stagnant with moral evil and of whose women Schiller declared, "there is not one of them but has had a *liaison*" the greatest crime which can be proved against him was that he made love on paper, for ten years, to a married lady seven years his senior. This is not the place to dwell on the part which Goethe's religious training played in his relations to this and other women but I am personally convinced that it was because Sin and Retribution were always real things to him (as well as because he was an egoist) that he kept himself as much as he did from what he believed to be wrong. He was, however, no "saint," but a very passionate man and again and again temptation beckoned to him often in forms which were maddeningly subtle because, on the surface, so little sensual.

The Second Part of Faust is, of course, Goethe's poetic rendering of these various episodes in his later life and I hereby acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Marshall Livingston Perrin for help in the understanding of this greatest of his works. Thanks are also due, and are gladly rendered, to Herr von. Bojanowski, Director of the Grand Ducal Library at Weimar for the kindly coöperation through which there came into my hands, while there, much

FOREWORD

Goethe-material generally inaccessible; to my friend, Mrs. Emma D. Marean, who has helped me in the final proof-reading; to Dr. Wilhelm Bode, the eminent Goethe authority, for valuable suggestions and quotation privileges and to the many other kind people in Weimar who so generously assisted the stranger from overseas in the performance of her difficult task.

My indebtedness to Goethe literature is, of course, enormous; for the most it has been acknowledged specifically in the body of the book. But I wish here to declare deep obligation to the numerous works of Heinrich Düntzer and to Bielschowsky's wonderful "Life" of Goethe. Thanks are, also, due to E. P. Dutton & Company for permission to use the paragraphs quoted from their London Library Edition of Lewes's "Goethe;" to the Houghton Mifflin Company for extracts given from "Goethe's Correspondence With A Child;" to Dodd, Mead and Company for the passages cited from Alfred S. Gibbs' work on "Goethe's Mother" and to the Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company for a translation which appeared in George Calvert's volume "Charlotte von Stein." For the most part, however, the translations used are, unless otherwise indicated, my own.

M. C. C.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1911.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	FOREWORD	v
I.	BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT	1
II.	GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA	18
III.	HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART	33
IV.	THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL	51
V.	GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE	73
VI.	CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER	108
VII.	LILI	136
VIII.	CHARLOTTE VON STEIN	167
IX.	FRAU AJA	214
X.	IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN	256
XI.	CHRISTIANE	295
XII.	GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES	320
XIII.	BETTINA	350
XIV.	MINNA HERZLIEB	376
XV.	MARIANNE VON WILLEMER	392
XVI.	THE POET'S LAST LOVE	416
XVII.	WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE	429
	INDEX	449

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
CHARLOTTE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE PUPPET THEATRE	6
GOETHE'S FATHER AND MOTHER	7
GOETHE HOUSE AT FRANKFORT	10
JEWISH QUARTER AT FRANKFORT	11
GOETHE, FROM THE PORTRAIT BY MAY	26
CORNELIA GOETHE	26
TWO VIEWS OF THE GARDEN AT THE FRANKFORT HOUSE TO-DAY	27
INN WHERE GOETHE LODGED IN LEIPZIG	34
GOETHE AND THE SILHOUETTE	34
KATHARINE SCHÖNKOPF	35
FREDERIKA OESER	35
AUERBACH'S KELLER, LEIPZIG	42
CHARLOTTE, HER HUSBAND AND THEIR CHILDREN	43
FRÄULEIN VON KLETTENBERG	54
ECKERMANN	55
STRASSBURG CATHEDRAL	72
VIEW FROM STRASSBURG CATHEDRAL	73
FREDERIKA'S HOME IN SESENHEIM	82
GOETHE AND FREDERIKA	83
GOETHE, FROM THE PORTRAIT BY RABE	88
FREDERIKA AWAITING GOETHE	89
CHARLOTTE CUTTING BREAD AND BUTTER	110

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
WERTHER AND LOTTE	111
GOETHE SKATING AT FRANKFORT	130
MAXIMILIANE LA ROCHE BRENTANO	131
GOETHE AND LILI	148
KARL AUGUST	149
CORONA SCHRÖTER	149
SCHILLER AT THE COURT OF WEIMAR	176
DUCHESS LOUISE	177
CHARLOTTE VON STEIN	186
PORTION OF THE CASTLE AT KOCHBERG, FROM A DRAWING BY GOETHE	186
GOETHE'S GARDEN-HOUSE AT WEIMAR	187
GOETHE ACTING BEFORE THE COURT OF WEIMAR	190
ROYAL LADIES IN THE GARDEN AT WEIMAR	191
CHARLOTTE VON STEIN'S HOME IN WEIMAR	210
GOETHE'S HOUSE IN THE GOETHE - PLATZ	211
FRAU AJA	248
ROSS MARKT, FRANKFORT, SHOWING THE LATER HOME OF GOETHE'S MOTHER	249
GOETHE OUTSIDE ROME, AFTER THE PAINTING BY TISCHBEIN	260
ANGELICA KAUFFMAN, FROM THE PORTRAIT BY HERSELF	260
CHRISTIANE, FROM GOETHE'S DRAWING	261
ANGELICA KAUFFMAN, FROM THE PORTRAIT BY REYNOLDS	261
GOETHE, FROM A PORTRAIT BY ANGELICA KAUFFMAN	268
EMMA HAMILTON, BY ROMNEY	269
MADDALENA RIGGI, FROM A DRAWING BY GOETHE	272
BARBARA SCHULTHESS	272
CHRISTIANE VULPIUS, FROM A DRAWING BY GOETHE	273
GOETHE AND HIS SON, FROM A PAINTING BY HANS M. SCHMIDT	302

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
GARDEN OF GOETHE'S TOWN HOUSE IN WEIMAR	303
DUCHESS ANNA AMALIA	324
TIEFURT	325
BELVEDERE TO-DAY	330
ETTERSBURG TO-DAY	331
KARL AUGUST	336
THE EVENING CIRCLE AT ANNA AMALIA'S	337
MADAME DE STAËL	364
THE CHILD BETTINA	365
BETTINA VON ARNIM	365
MINNA HERZLIEB	380
OTILIE VON GOETHE	380
AUGUST VON GOETHE	381
MARIANNE VON WILLEMER	394
CHRISTIANE NEUMANN	394
CHRISTIANE VULPIUS	394
GOETHE, FROM THE PAINTING BY HEINRICH KOLBE	395
ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW	416
SCHILLER	417
GOETHE IN HIS STUDY	438
GOETHE AND FRITZ VON STEIN	438
ROOM IN WHICH GOETHE DIED	439
INTERIOR OF GOETHE'S GARDEN-HOUSE	442
SCHILLER HOUSE, SHOWING ROOM IN WHICH THE POET DIED	443
STEPS LEADING TO THE " RÖMISCHE HAUS " IN WEIMAR'S PARK	446
FÜRSTENGruFT, WHERE GOETHE AND SCHILLER LIE BURIED, BE- SIDE KARL AUGUST	446
GOETHE - SCHILLER MONUMENT, WEIMAR	447

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

CHAPTER I

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

To the mothers of most famous men the world pays graceful tribute because it is assumed that the contribution of these women to the renown of their sons has been by no means inconsiderable. In the case of Goethe, however, appreciative consideration of his mother's personality has about it nothing forced or formal. Here is a woman of whom one cannot write save with real interest and loving enthusiasm. Among Goethe's friends, who were wont to seek out the Frau Rath, as she was called in Frankfort, for the sake of doing honour to the mother of her son, admiration of the woman for her own sake soon took the place of merely conventional regard; and it is the same with the biographer. For Katherine Elizabeth Textor Goethe is one of the most engaging figures in all literary his-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

tory and it is no wonder that a poet who had rare taste in the selection of his women friends, made of his mother his lifelong confidant and comrade.¹

"I and my Wolfgang have always held fast to each other, because we were both young together," she once remarked. Then she added with characteristic frankness, that she had never been fit to bring up a child. "For I gave my little ones every wish so long as they laughed and were good, and I whipped them if they cried or made wry faces, without looking for any reason why they laughed or cried."

The whippings were few and far between though. This girl-mother (she was only eighteen when Goethe was born) "spoiled" her children on principle; she was by no means careful that the sweets which spell bliss at the moment and the tortures of colic afterwards, should be securely locked away, and the passage in *Meister's Apprenticeship* which describes a childish raid on the family pantry is undoubtedly autobiographical. Goethe's mother herself liked sweets, even in her old age. When she came to die she gave detailed orders to her servants, all of whom adored her, that they should not be sparing of the raisins in her funeral-cake,

¹ Goethe himself said of her — in 1814, when he revisited Frankfurt — "Sie war des Lebens werth" (she was worthy of life).

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

as she never could endure that in her life and it would certainly chafe her in her grave. She likewise directed what kind of wines were to be served on this festive occasion. Having been invited to go to a party on the day she breathed her last she sent the answer that "Madam Goethe could not come as she was engaged just then in dying."

Goethe might well attribute to his mother his keen love of life and, indeed, most of the qualities which made him a great artist.

" Vom Vater hab' ich die Statur,
Des Lebens ernstes Führen;
Von Mütterchen die Frohnatur,
Die Lust zu fabuliren,"¹

the poet wrote of himself. And it may as well be added at once that he always valued his paternal heritage less highly than the gift of writing and the "philosophy of a cheerful life" which was his mother's dower.

Goethe was born in Frankfort-on-the-Main, August 28, 1749, and some years later Bettina von Arnim, "that bold young lady" — as Hutton² calls her — favoured him and the world at large with

¹ " From father came my sturdy frame,
To serious tasks impelling;
From mother zest for Life, the game
And joy in story-telling."

² Richard Holt Hutton, *Goethe and His Influence*.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

a graphic description of the circumstances attending his entry upon life. "The bed in which your mother brought you into the world," she writes (the translation, too, is hers), "had blue checkered hangings. She was then seventeen¹ years old, and one year married; hereupon she remarked you would always remain young, and your heart would never become old, since you had the youth of your mother into the bargain. Three days did you consider about it before you entered the world, and caused your mother heavy hours. Through anger that necessity had driven you from your nature-home and through the ill-treatment of the midwife, you appeared quite black and without sign of life. They laid you in a butcher's tray, and bathed the pit of your heart with wine, quite despairing of your existence. Your grandmother stood behind the bed. When you first opened your eyes, she exclaimed, 'Daughter, he lives!' 'Then awoke my maternal heart, and lived since then in continual enthusiasm to this very hour,' said your mother to me in her seventy-seventh year."

This wealth of maternal love soon came to be lavished almost solely upon Wolfgang, for of several children born later, all died in infancy with the exception of the daughter Cornelia, and she, Goethe's

¹ Eighteen, really.

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

twin-soul throughout all his childhood and young manhood, died, also, when only twenty-seven. Toward the end of his life, Goethe appears to have felt some compunction that he had not tried harder to love the Rath (Councillor) Goethe who had the honour to be his father. But I, for one, cannot blame him because he limited to respect his emotions toward this pedagogical personage, who, being a man of leisure, "made business out of his domestic life." My own strong feeling in regard to the husband of the Frau Rath is resentment that he should so long have had the chance to lord it disagreeably over her. Goethe evidently felt this, too, for, when it was suggested to him in his mother's old age that she be put under guardianship in order not to spend too much of her money, he replied that he wanted her to have a good time; she had earned it.

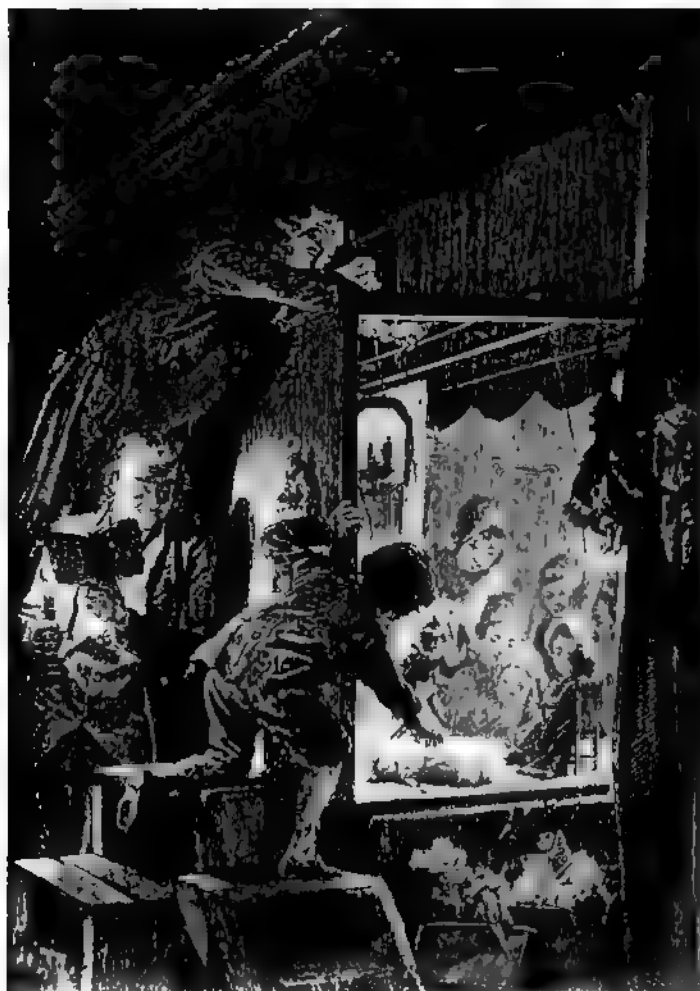
For when a gay, pleasure-loving girl of seventeen, Katherine Textor, the eldest daughter of Frankfort's chief magistrate, had been taken to wife by this settled old bachelor of thirty-nine, already retired from business. During the early months of their married life her husband boresomely plied her with the knowledge with which he had been crammed and for which he had not heretofore found an outlet. It was only by becoming a mother, indeed, that she escaped these didactic attentions.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

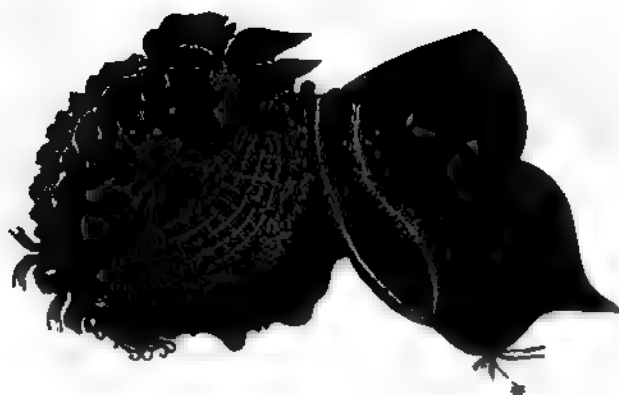
In that most charming of autobiographies, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe relates how he and Cornelia then fell heir to their father's pedagogical zeal.

Happily, there was one subject upon which the pedantic parent was able to communicate enthusiasm to his children. He had a passion for Italy and all things Italian, having in his youth made a tour in Italy, which he regarded as the great event of his life. So, whenever he talked of that fair south-land or taught poor Cornelia the language thereof, a vague yearning like that reflected in the song of Mignon could be discerned in the man, — making the schoolmaster momentarily human. "His otherwise serious and dry manner seemed to relax and quicken, and thus a passionate wish awoke in us children to participate in the paradise he described," writes Goethe. The poet and his father could always get together on the subject of Italy; it was the one enthusiasm which they sincerely shared as life went on with them both.

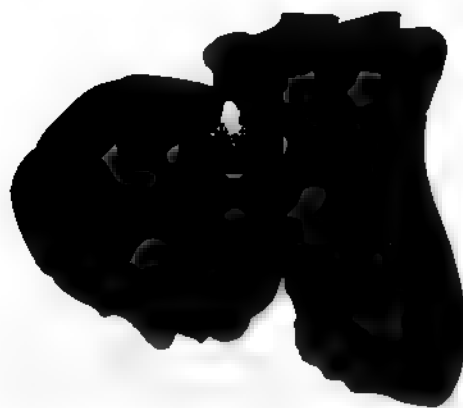
The puppet episode in *Wilhelm Meister* came from Goethe's own experience, for a doting grandmother — his father's aged mother in whose house they all lived — had given him a set of these stage-playthings when he was only a little fellow, and he and Cornelia had rare good times with them,



THE PUPPET THEATRE.



GOETHE'S MOTHER.



GOETHE'S FATHER.

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

aided and abetted by Mütterchen. It was with Mütterchen's connivance, also, — she could deny her dear ones nothing, — that Wolfgang began to go freely to the French theatre,¹ when he was only twelve. There is little doubt that at this time he saw a good deal behind the scenes — to which he had access through his acquaintanceship with the children of some of the players — which it would have been just as well for him not to have encountered at so tender an age.

“ My new friend took me with him to the stage,” Goethe relates, “ and led me particularly to the green-room, where the actors and actresses remained during the intervals of the performance, and dressed and undressed. The place was neither convenient nor agreeable, for they had squeezed the theatre into a concert room, so that there were no separate chambers for the actors behind the stage. A tolerably large room adjoining, which had formerly served for card-parties, was now mostly used by both sexes in common, who appeared to feel as little ashamed before each other as before us children, if there was not always the strictest propriety in putting on or changing the articles of dress. I had

¹ This was at the time of the Seven Years' War and just after the intervention of the French in favour of Austria. A French garrison was quartered in Frankfort and the introduction of the soldiers was naturally followed by the establishment of a French theatre.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

never seen anything of the kind before; and yet from habit, after repeated visits I soon found it quite natural." The shocking laxity of manners ascribed to the players in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* comes to mind as one reads this passage.

It is not surprising to learn that the boy and his father had many a hot discussion over this free indulgence in theatre going. "But my passion for it grew with every performance," the Autobiography tells us, "and I did not miss an evening, though, on every occasion, when, after the play, I sat down with the family to supper, — often putting up with the remains, — I had to endure the constant reproaches of my father, that theatres were useless and would lead to nothing. In these cases I adduced all and every argument which is at hand for the apologists of the stage when they fall into a difficulty like mine. Vice in prosperity and virtue in misfortune are in the end set right by poetical justice. Those beautiful examples of misdeeds punished, *Miss Sarah Sampson* and the *Merchant of London*, were very energetically cited on my part; but, on the other hand, I often came off worse when the *Fourberies de Scapin* and others of the sort were in the bill, and I was forced to hear reproaches for the delight felt by the public in the deceits of in-

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

triguing servants and the successful follies of prodigal young men. Neither party was convinced; but my father was very soon reconciled to the theatre when he saw that I advanced with incredible rapidity in the French language."

The Boy was very clever at languages, but since he hated the labour of digging about among their roots and irregular verbs, he set himself to make the task amusing. "It occurred to me that I might despatch all at once and I therefore invented a romance," he tells us, "of six brothers and sisters, who, separated from each other and scattered over the world, should communicate with one another alternately as to their conditions and feelings. The eldest brother gives an account in good German of all the manifold objects and incidents of his journey. The sister in a ladylike style with short sentences and nothing but stops, much as *Siegwart* was afterwards written, answers now him now the other brothers, partly about domestic matters and partly about affairs of the heart. One brother studies theology and writes a very formal Latin to which he often adds a Greek postscript. To another brother, holding the place of mercantile clerk at Hamburg, the English correspondence naturally falls, while a still younger one at Marseilles has the French. For the Italian was found

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

a musician, on his first trip into the world; while the youngest of all, a sort of pert nestling, had applied himself to Jew-German, the other languages having been cut off from him, and by means of his frightful ciphers brought the rest of them into despair, and my parents into a hearty laugh at the good notion."

This determination of Goethe's to learn Jew-German was probably due to the fact that the Jewish quarter of Frankfort had excited in him very keen interest. He was an inquisitive boy and he was wont to wander about through the filth and the crowd of Judengasse, torn between æsthetic revolt from its ugliness (he would never play with any except pretty children) and consuming curiosity about the life and the ceremonies of the strange people who there made their home. He came to like as well as respect the Jews as a result of this intimate knowledge of them. In fact he liked people, generally, especially the so-called common people whom he pronounced the best of human beings. In this, again, he resembled his mother, for she once declared that she "loved human kind and that old and young felt it." Of her great son, who inherited her genial, sensitive and sensuous temperament, precisely the same thing was true — even when he was still only a lad. The Jews, for instance, feeling



GOETHE HOUSE AT FRANKFORT AS IT LOOKED IN HIS
BOYHOOD DAYS.

From a pencil drawing by Louis A. Holman.



JEWISH QUARTER OF FRANKFORT.

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

his interest in them made him welcome at a circumcision and a wedding, and even let him "form a notion of a Feast of the Tabernacles."

Besides the Jews Goethe, as a lad, made the acquaintance of many other humble folk in the busy little city of Frankfort. His father was a lover of beautiful things and he used to let Wolfgang manage for him the matter of seeing that commissions which he had given the craftsmen of the place were executed on time. All this delighted the boy because it gave him many opportunities to meet people of every class and share their joys and sorrows. "Thus I learned to know every one's method of proceeding," he says, "and what advantages and hardships were incident to this or that mode of life. . . . The household economy of many crafts, which took its form and colour from the occupation, was likewise an object of my quiet attention; and thus was developed and strengthened in me the feeling of the equality, if not of all men, yet of all human conditions."

To this sympathetic understanding of people in lower social strata than his own may be attributed many of Goethe's most marked characteristics. Only a man who had known from experience that girls in humble walks of life are quite as frequently virtuous as those higher placed socially could have

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

drawn with such exquisite sympathy the maiden Dorothea or have made of the Marguerite whom Faust betrays one of the most noble and appealing figures in all literature. "You call woman fickle," Goethe says somewhere. "You err; she but roams in search of a steadfast man." Peculiarly is this true of Marguerite, the girl who, though the victim of sin, never loses the original purity of her nature.

The prototype of Marguerite was Gretchen, the daughter of a Frankfort petty shopkeeper, whom Goethe loved when a boy of sixteen, having come to know her in the course of those devious wanderings around old Frankfort of which we have just been speaking. Through a former school-fellow he had made the acquaintance of a set of youths belonging to the lower middle class, who supported themselves in that nondescript fashion known as "living by their wits," and, one day, having accompanied some of these youths home, he saw and forthwith fell in love with Gretchen. The background of their future meetings was a cheap eating-house, but there is no suggestion of tawdriness in the character of the girl who pervades the story as Goethe tells it. On the occasion of their first encounter the wine had given out and one of Goethe's young companions called for the serving maid. "But instead of the

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

maid," we read, "there came in a girl of uncommon and, when one saw her with all around her, of incredible beauty. 'What do you desire?' she asked after having cordially wished us good evening; 'the maid is ill in bed. Can I serve you?' 'The wine is out,' said one;—'if you would fetch us a few bottles, it would be very kind.' 'Do it, Gretchen,' said another. 'It is but a stone's throw from here.' 'Why not?' she answered and, taking a few empty bottles from the table, she hastened out.

"Her form, as seen from behind, was very attractive. The little cap sat so neatly upon her little head, which a slender throat united very gracefully to her neck and shoulders. Everything about her seemed choice, and one could survey her whole figure the more at ease as one's attention was no more exclusively attracted and fettered by the quiet honest eyes and lovely mouth. I reproved my comrades for sending the girl out alone at night, but they only laughed at me, and I was soon consoled by her return, as the publican lived just across the way. 'Sit down with us,' said one. She did so, but alas, she did not come near me. She drank a glass to our health and speedily departed, advising us not to stay very long together, and not to be so noisy, as her mother was just going to bed. . . .

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

"The form of that girl," continues the narrative,¹ "followed me from that moment on every path; it was the first durable impression which a female being had made upon me; and as I could find no pretext to see her at home, and would not seek one, I went to church for love of her and soon traced out where she sat. Thus, during the long Protestant service I gazed my fill at her. When the congregation left the church I did not venture to accost her, much less accompany her, and was perfectly delighted if she seemed to have remarked me and to have returned my greeting with a nod."

Yet he was not long denied the happiness of approaching her, and when he came to her humble home "Gretchen sat at the window spinning;² the mother was going to and fro. . . . My liking for her grew incredibly. . . . The first propensities to love in an uncorrupted youth take altogether a spiritual direction. Nature seems to desire that one sex may by the senses perceive goodness and beauty in the other. And thus to me, by the sight of this girl, by my strong inclination for her, a new world of the beautiful and the excellent had arisen."

Gretchen saw to it, too, that Goethe's love for

¹ In *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

² Note in this and in the church episode incidents utilized in *Faust*.

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

her was *kept* on the high plane of which the poet here writes. Though she went to many picnics and pleasure parties with him and the rest of her brother's comrades she never permitted, and he never offered, the slightest familiarity. The coronation of Kaiser Joseph II. was the occasion of increased festivities on the part of the little group, and, one night, just after the clock struck twelve, Wolfgang, to his dismay, found that he had forgotten the door-key with which, hitherto, he had been able to evade paternal knowledge of his late hours. Gretchen proposed that they should all remain together and pass the night in conversation. This was agreed on, but one after another of the tired healthy young people having dropped asleep (including a betrothed couple, the girl with her head on the shoulder of her beloved), Goethe's companion also at length succumbed. For a long time he supported her while she slept. Then he, too, gave way to fatigue, and when he awoke it was broad day and Gretchen was standing before a mirror arranging her cap. She nodded and smiled to him with a little more than her usual friendliness, or so, at any rate, it seemed to her lover, and he left for home triumphing in the thought that the girl was truly fond of him.

The dénouement, which soon followed, gave

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

a very sordid tinge to what had been a beautiful idyl, and shattered in one blow Goethe's dream of sweet young love. For the joyous companions were found to be concerned with the forging of certain documents and Gretchen, among others, was accused! Even Wolfgang had to undergo a severe examination through which, however, being perfectly innocent, he, of course, came off scatheless. But there was suffering in store for him, none the less. For when Gretchen (whose innocence was, also, speedily established) was cross-examined in regard to his connection with the others and with herself, she said, "I will not deny that I have often seen him and seen him with pleasure, but I treated him as a child and my affection for him was merely that of a sister."

Goethe's budding manliness and his never-backward self-esteem suffered mightily on hearing this. But the humorous aspect of the thing struck him also. "I found it frightful," he declares, "that I had sacrificed sleep, repose and health for the sake of a girl who was pleased to consider me a babe, and to imagine herself, with respect to me, something very much like a nurse." When the poet, however, came to look back on his happy hours with Gretchen, he enshrined her in his marvellous *Faust* and wrote these touching verses called

BOYHOOD DAYS IN FRANKFORT

FIRST LOVE.

Oh, who will bring me back the days,
So beautiful, so bright,
Those days when love first bore my heart
Aloft on pinions light?
Oh, who will bring me but an hour
Of that delightful time,
And wake in me again the power
That fired my golden prime?

I nurse my wound in solitude,
I sigh the livelong day,
And mourn the joys, in wayward mood,
That now are passed away.
Oh, who will bring me back the days
Of that delightful time,
And wake in me again the blaze
That fired my golden prime? ¹

¹ Translation of Theodore Martin.

CHAPTER II

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

It was characteristic of Goethe that, whenever he was in love with one woman, there had to be another to whom he could pour out his soul in praise of his *inamorata*. This other, during the affair of Gretchen, was his sister Cornelia, a woman of the twentieth century who had the misfortune to live in the eighteenth, a woman of whom her eminent brother, in trying to analyze her character to Eckermann, said "She would have been much more in her place as an abbess in a convent than married." For Cornelia had yearnings for a "career," and she married because she could not realize them. The result was tragic, as we shall see, for her husband, herself and her children; and she died at the early age of twenty-seven.

Sainte-Beuve maintains that "the superior man will be recognized, recovered to a certainty, at least in part, in his parents (his mother especially) and in his sisters." How true this was of Goethe and his

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

mother we have already seen; and when, to join their happy communion, there came along a little girl, sixteen months younger than the wonderful boy, the lad began at once to show that extraordinary devotion which lasted until Cornelia's untimely death. This close relationship inevitably had the effect of making the two even more alike than they would otherwise have been. "Wolfgang carried her all she wanted," the mother of them both records, "wished no one else to feed and nurse her, and was jealous when she was taken out of the cradle in which he watched over her." Together the two suffered the pedagogical tortures inflicted by their father, together they manipulated the puppets¹ which had been given them by their fond grandmother, and together they planned for the joyous playtime which daily succeeded the grind of the lesson period.

"My sister was a magnet which always acted upon me strongly," writes the poet himself in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. "She, only a year younger than I, had lived my whole conscious period of life with me, and was thus bound to me by the closest ties. To these natural causes was added a forcible motive, which proceeded from our domestic position; a

¹ Their puppet-theatre may still be seen in the Museum of the Goethe house in Frankfort; visitors linger long before its queer little figures, docile actors of Goethe's first plays.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

father certainly affectionate and well meaning, but grave, who because he cherished within a very tender heart, externally, with incredible consistency, maintained a brazen sternness, that he might attain the end of giving his children the best education and of building up, regulating and preserving his well-founded house; a mother on the other hand, almost a child yet, who first grew up to consciousness with and in her two eldest children; these three as they looked at the world with healthy eyes, capable of life and desiring present enjoyment. This contradiction, floating in the family, increased with years. My father followed out his views, unshaken and uninterrupted; the mother and children could not give up their feelings, their claims, their wishes.

“Under these circumstances it was natural that brother and sister should attach themselves close to each other and adhere to their mother, that they might singly snatch the pleasures forbidden as a whole. But since the hours of solitude and toil were very long compared to the moments of recreation and enjoyment, — especially for my sister, who could never leave the house for so long a time as I could, — the necessity she felt for entertaining herself with me was further sharpened by the sense of longing with which she accompanied me to a distance.

“As in our first years, playing and learning,

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

growth and education had been quite common to both of us, so that we might well have been taken for twins, so did this community, this confidence, remain during the development of our physical and moral powers. That interest of youth, that amazement at the awakening of sensual impulses which clothe themselves in mental forms, of mental necessities which clothe themselves in sensual images, all the reflections upon these which obscure rather than enlighten us, — as the fog covers over and does not illumine the vale from which it is about to rise, — the many errors and aberrations springing therefrom, — all these the brother and sister shared and endured hand in hand, and were the less enlightened as to their strange condition, in that, the nearer they wished to approach each other, to clear up their minds, the more forcibly did the sacred awe of their close relationship keep them apart."

One can understand, after reading this, that it may indeed have been true, as some one has pointed out, that Cornelia accepted marriage as compensation for the loss of her brother. Through the Gretchen episode they had drawn very near to each other, but almost immediately after that affair had attained its pitiful climax the brilliant youth was packed off to Leipzig and poor Cornelia was left to be the sole butt of her father's didactic impulses, while forced

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

to carry around, at the same time, a heart which ached for her brother's presence and which had, also, been somewhat wounded by the ambiguous attentions of a young Englishman who played the violin and was named Harry. All that we know of Cornelia's inner life at this time is derived from a pathetic little set of diary-letters, written in indifferent French to one of her young girl friends in a neighbouring city. For many years these letters lay neglected among the effects left behind by her to whom they had been sent, but during the preparations for celebrating the centenary of Goethe's birth they came to light in Leipzig and were forthwith edited and published by Professor Otto Jahn. They help us, halting though they are, to understand Cornelia Goethe a little better than we should otherwise have been able to do, and so are well worth our rather careful attention.

The friend to whom these letters were addressed was Katherine Fabricius, a maiden who, in the summer of 1767, while on a visit to a Frankfort cousin, came to know and greatly love Goethe's sister. When the letters, which were sent secretly, begin, Goethe is away at Leipzig. It was, indeed, partly to relieve her lonely and aching heart that Cornelia embarked upon this curious correspondence. But ere the intercourse has come to an end Goethe

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

is at home convalescing from an illness, and there are occasional references, on Cornelia's part, to him and to his much-prized opinions. One of these assures Katherine "que quand mon frère loue quelqu'un il faut qu'il [does she mean qu'elle?] ait beaucoup de mérite."

Monotonous in the extreme is shown to be the life led by this girl of fine intelligence and lively disposition in the house over which her martinet of a father ruled with rod of iron. Somewhat curiously she seems to have derived from her mother very little of the comfort Wolfgang would have received under similar circumstances; the Frau Rath is scarcely mentioned in any of the letters. Because papa did not approve of picnics even this mild form of dissipation was denied her and, save that she "drank the waters" and occasionally visited some show-gardens at the other end of the town, she appears to have had no wholesome out-of-door interests. Indoors, an agreeable source of distraction was the piano, upon which she could perform with considerable skill. "Je jouerai un air sur le clavecin [she once writes when much excited] "que ces vapeurs passent."

Social intercourse, as Cornelia knew it, consisted chiefly of afternoon visits, — previously announced to each other by the friends who made them, — which ended punctually at eight o'clock (ten o'clock was

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

bedtime); in winter, formal parties were held, every Tuesday, alternately, at the house of one or other family, and every Friday a concert was given in the salon of Herr Busch, where the *élite* of the city met. Had this same *élite* been of anything like Cornelia Goethe's own mental calibre the opportunity thus afforded for meeting them would seem to have been adequate. But she and her brother felt Frankforters to be only dull folk and probably showed this in their bearing. Girl-like, however, Cornelia seized with avidity such chances for merriment as came her way and we occasionally find her quite excited over the prospect of a coming ball. Her joy in such gatherings strikes one as pitiful, however, after reading in Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann* that "when a ball or festival was at hand Cornelia was generally afflicted with an eruption on the face, a thing so odd that it may be ascribed to the influence of something dæmonic."

This comment of Cornelia's brother was, of course, made in his old age and after his own belief in the dæmonic element in life had grown to a certainty. But Cornelia appears to have felt, even as a young girl, that the fates did not mean kindly towards her, and this conviction, in turn, tended to make her increasingly self-conscious and a bit shrewish withal. Yet behind and beneath her petulance is the earnest

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

longing of a sensitive heart for love and the innate consciousness of her own love-worthiness in spite of (and this is the crux of the matter), *in spite of* her lack of personal beauty. As she grew from girlhood into womanhood the corroding certainty that, because she was not beautiful, she could never inspire love and so need never hope for happiness, gained greater and greater ascendancy over her mind and led her finally to the step which, for her, marked the end of hope.

Yet Cornelia was by no means ugly or repulsive. Goethe in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* description of her says: "She was tall, well and delicately formed, and possessed something naturally dignified in her demeanour, which melted into a pleasing tenderness. Her features, neither striking nor beautiful, evidenced a being which was not and could not become reconciled with itself. Her eyes, while not the most beautiful I have ever seen, were yet most profound, and beneath them a great deal might be looked for. When expressing regard or affection they burned with an incomparable lustre; yet they were not like those glances proceeding from a heart alive with longing and desire; their expression mirrored a soul anxious to impart and not to receive.

"That which peculiarly disfigured her appearance so as to make her at times look positively repulsive,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

was the fashion of the time, which not alone exposed the forehead but contributed to make it apparently or really adventitiously or premeditatedly larger. Possessing the most feminine and purest arched brow (and at the same time a pair of thick black eyebrows and prominent eyes), this combination of striking features formed a contrast, which, if at first sight not repugnant to a stranger, was at least not attractive. This she soon perceived, and the feeling grew to be the more painful to her as she approached that age when both sexes take innocent delight in making themselves respectively more agreeable to each other.

“To no person can his own figure be hateful; the ugliest as well as the most beautiful has a right to rejoice in his existence; and since kindness is forbearing and one views kindly his own reflection in a mirror, we may maintain that everyone regards himself with satisfaction even though disposed to be captious. My sister, however, possessed so sound an understanding that it was impossible she could be blind and silly on this point; she was perhaps more aware than was necessary that she stood far behind her playmates in mere beauty, without feeling to her consolation her infinite superiority to them in power of intellect.”

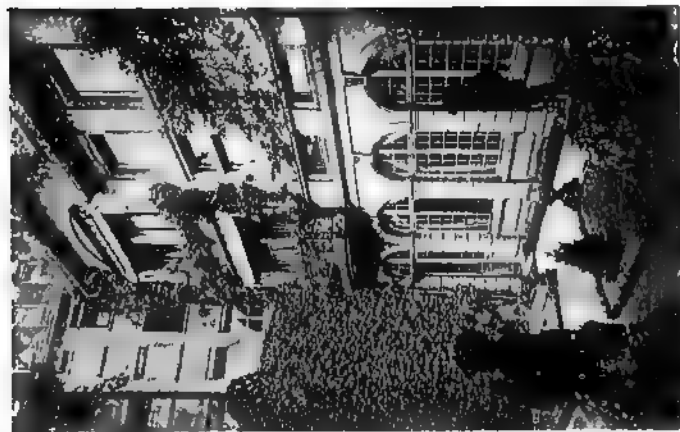
Poor Cornelia! Have we not all known plain but



GOETHE.
From the portrait by May.



CORNELIA GOETHE.
From a drawing by her brother.



TWO VIEWS OF THE GARDEN AT THE FRANKFORT HOUSE TO - DAY.

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

clever young girls who, like her, would gladly have become quite stupid for the sake of having plenty of partners at a dance and candy and violets from the right man? To such, too, the possession on the part of a brother, however loved, of beauty he could quite as well have gotten along without, is an additional burden grievous to be borne. For while in their earlier years the resemblance between Wolfgang and his sister was so great that they might almost have been taken for twins, as each approached the twenties, he became constantly more and more handsome and she more and more plain. The only portrait of Cornelia that has come down to us was drawn by Goethe himself on the broad margin of a proof sheet of *Goetz* in the year 1773, and though sketched in all lovingness, the extravagant height of the pompadour, when superadded to a high forehead, is certainly unfortunate. Yet the resemblance between the brother and sister is unmistakable, particularly when this portrait of Cornelia is compared with that of Goethe painted by May in the year 1779.

To her friend Katherine, who appears to have said soothingly in one of her letters that Cornelia was "really not so bad-looking" (it is thus our friends are apt to put the thing, isn't it), the sensitive girl replies: "Je vous prie de ne plus me faire rougir par

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

. Vos louanges que je ne mérite en aucune façon. Si ce n'étoit pas Vous, ma chère, j'aurois été un peu piquée de ce que vous dites de mon extérieur, car je pourrais alors le prendre pour de la satire; mais je sais que c'est la bonté de votre cœur qui exige de Vous de me regarder ainsi. Cependant mon miroir ne me trompe pas s'il me dit que j'enlaidis¹ à vue d'œil. Ce ne sont pas là des manières, ma chère enfant, je parle du fond du cœur et je Vous dis aussi que j'en suis quelquefois pénétrée de douleur, et que *je donnerois tout au monde pour être belle.*"

Knowing that this is but a vain wish, however, she surrenders all hope of ever finding happiness in love. "Qu'en dites Vous, ma chère, que j'ai renoncé pour jamais à l'amour. Ne riez pas, je parle sérieusement, cette passion m'a fait trop souffrir, pour que je ne lui dise pas adieu de tout mon cœur. Il y eut un temps, où, remplie des idées romanesque je crûs qu'un engagement ne pût être parfaitement heureux sans amour mutuel mais je suis revenue de ces folies là."

In yet harsher terms she says, later, in utter hopelessness, that beauty is so dangerous a gift that, after all, it is a sort of consolation to her not to have the responsibility of it. "Yet when I weigh this con-

¹ That I am ugly to look at.

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

solation against the pleasure it would be to be beautiful," she admits, "the former loses all its merits," and then she continues in bitter self-revelation, "I shall probably not remain unmarried; that is ridiculous to think about; yet only deep conjugal love, as it seems to me, can render a union happy, and how can I, who possess no charm of person, inspire such love? The thought of marrying a husband whom I do not love fills me with horror, but I realize that that is the only course left to me. For where should *I* find an attractive man who would for a moment think of me? I long ago abandoned romantic thoughts of marriage for myself, but I have never lost the ideal of lofty love between the man and woman who are husband and wife."

Again we can only say "Poor Cornelia," pitying her this time because she lived before the day when a woman who may not marry the man she loves can, by searching, find some other interest with which to fill her life. Her sad presentiment of a loveless marriage was soon fulfilled. One of the students, who was in the circle of Goethe's intimates at Leipzig, found his friend's sister sufficiently attractive to inspire in him a very deep and real passion. "Here there was met," says Goethe, "as good a match as could be wished, and my sister, who had steadfastly

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

rejected several other good offers, — but from insignificant men, whom she always had an aversion to, — allowed herself to be, I may as well say, *talked into* accepting Schlosser."

The ensuing engagement was a rather long one because the young man was waiting for a desirable appointment he felt fairly sure must soon be his. This appointment would have meant a Court-residence and congenial society for Cornelia. But, instead of getting the good place, Schlosser was appointed upper Bailiff in Emmendingen, and Cornelia had to follow him (they were married in 1773) to a district "which," says the sympathetic Goethe, "must have seemed to her a solitude, a desert. Her dwelling was spacious, to be sure, and stately with a kind of official dignity, but it was destitute, from its location, of all chance of society."

As might have been expected, Cornelia was wretchedly, tragically unhappy. For this Schlosser was not at all to blame; the cause lay deeply seated in her own disposition and in her inability to surrender herself unreservedly to the man whose wife she had become. The morbid streak which had made her write on her eighteenth birthday, "The years that are gone have slipped by like a dream and the future will pass in the same fashion, but with this difference, I foresee: that there will be many

GOETHE'S SISTER CORNELIA

more trials and burdens to experience than I have already met," this morbidness increased and deepened until her very existence became a thing wearisome for her to endure.

I sometimes wonder if Ibsen had been studying the life of Cornelia Goethe when he wrote *Hedda Gabler*, in so many ways do the situations of the two women resemble each other. (Only Cornelia was not wicked as Hedda was.) Both were brilliant women married to kind, plodding pedants. George Schlosser, like George Tesman, was always working on a ponderous book that entailed endless research (he wrote a heavy reply to Pope's "Essay on Man"), and this characteristic of itself was maddening to Cornelia, who had been for years an intimate part of her brother's swift and inspired methods of composition. Moreover, — and we come now to the heart of the matter, — it appears to have been true, as Goethe said, that "Cornelia had not a trace of sensuality about her. The thought of resigning herself to a man was repulsive to her, and we may imagine that this peculiarity caused many unpleasant hours in marriage. Women who have a similar aversion or *do not love their husbands* will feel the force of what I am here saying." ¹

¹ Eckermann, p. 543.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The italicized words clarify this entire passage and show that Goethe's marvellous understanding of the eternal feminine did not desert him when he came to consider the fate of his much-loved sister.

CHAPTER III

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

GOETHE'S first period of residence away from home began in the month of October, 1765, when he arrived in Leipzig to enter upon collegiate life, as a serious student of jurisprudence. The subject as well as the university in which it was to be studied had been selected by Rath Goethe. The son would have preferred a course in general literature at Göttingen, but the father wished him to go to the university in which he himself had studied and in which the department of jurisprudence was particularly strong. So Goethe accepted Leipzig with what grace he could and, taking lodgings at an inn called the Fire Ball (Feuer Kugel), proceeded to present his letters of introduction and to look about him.

He had arrived just at the time of the annual fair, and from the spectacle presented by this festival he derived, as he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, "particular pleasure." "For here I saw before me the continuation of a state of things belonging to my native city, familiar wares and traders; . . . I

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

rambled about the market and booths with much interest, but my attention was particularly attracted by the inhabitants of the Eastern countries in their strange dresses, the Poles and Russians, and above all the Greeks, for the sake of whose handsome forms and dignified costume I often went to the spot. But this animated bustle was soon over and the city itself appeared before me, with its handsome, high and uniform houses. . . . My letters of introduction had given me the *entrée* into good families, whose circle of relatives also received me well."

Now, for the first time, Goethe became conscious that he lacked polished manners, modish clothes and that perfect ease in any social circle which is but rarely — truth to tell — the possession of any college undergraduate. And he set about promptly to acquire all three. For in Leipzig there prevailed, by reflection from the court of Dresden, a rather peculiar brand of "gallantry," and this gave to the social customs of the place a refinement of life quite new to the lad from Frankfort. But he had the will to learn how to bear himself with seemliness in good society and, what is of more importance, he had the wit to know that from no quarter could he get better instruction in this direction than from a gracious, charming woman. It was first in Leipzig that he took the advice which he offers others in *Tasso*:



THE INN WHERE GOETHE LODGED IN LEIPZIG.



GOETHE AND THE SILHOUETTE.
By Kraus.



KATHARINE SCHÖNEKOPF.
From a miniature.



FREDERIKA OESER.

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

“Willst du genau erfahren was sich ziemt,
So frage nur bei edlen Frauen an.”¹

The lady selected for the high office of Social Mentor to Wolfgang Goethe was Frau Böhme, the wife of his chief professor, a delicate, accomplished woman who gave him lessons in *l'ombre* and *piquet* and instructed him how to accept an invitation properly, as well as how to bear himself with grace after he had accepted it. She also opened up to his mind some of the principles of poetic criticism, and we may well believe that, by her strictures on his writings (which he read to her without telling her who was their author), she brought him to a juster appreciation of poetic values than he had ever had before. “In a short time,” he comments whimsically, “the beautiful variegated meadows at the foot of the German Parnassus, where I was fond of luxuriating, were mercilessly mowed down and I was even compelled to toss about the drying hay myself and to ridicule as lifeless that which a short time before had given me such lively joy.” Frau Böhme, however, was not at all a well woman, and, after her death, which came early in Goethe's Leipzig career, he withdrew himself from her world and began to mingle more intimately with the young writing-men to whom he

¹ If you would know the right thing to be done, ask some well-born woman.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

had been introduced by George Schlosser, who afterwards became his brother-in-law.

Schlosser was ten years Goethe's senior and through this advantage of seniority had connections with a literary set among whom poetic discussion formed the staple of conversation. These comrades were wont to meet at the house of one Schönkopf, who lived in the Brühl, No. 79. Schönkopf was both a *Weinhandler* and a *Hauswirth*; but this does not mean that he was either a saloon-keeper or a landlord, in the ordinary use of these words. Instead, it implies that he kept a *table d'hôte* (at which wine might be bought) and occasionally let bedrooms to travellers. His wife was a lively and cultivated woman who belonged to a good Frankfort family, so that the daughter Katherine, to whom Goethe now transferred the affection he had previously lavished on Gretchen, was by no means Goethe's social inferior — as those who call her "an inn-keeper's daughter" would seem to have us think. George Henry Lewes makes this distinction very clear in his *Life and Works of Goethe*, going on to say: "Goethe soon became one of the family. For there is a wide difference between the dining custom in Germany and in England. The English student, clerk or bachelor who dines at an eating-house, chop-house or hotel goes there simply to get his

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

dinner and perhaps look at the *Times*. Of the other diners he knows nothing, cares little. Quite otherwise in Germany. There the same society is generally to be found at the same table. The *table d'hôte* is composed of a circle of habitués, varied by occasional visitors who, in time, become, perhaps, members of the circle. Even with strangers, conversation is freely interchanged; and in a little while friendships are formed over these dinner tables, according as natural taste and liking assimilate, which, extending beyond the mere hour of dinner, are carried into the current of life. Germans do not rise so hastily from the table as we, for time, with them, is not so precious; life is not so crowded; time can be found for quiet after-dinner talk. The cigars and coffee, which appear before the cloth is removed, keep the company together; . . . In such society must we imagine Goethe in the Schönkopf establishment, among students and men of letters all eager in advancing their own opinions, and combating the false taste which was not their own. To complete this picture and to separate it still more from our English customs, you must imagine host and hostess dining at the table while their charming daughter, who had cooked, or helped cook the dinner, brought them the wine."

Goethe's own description of the daughter

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

pleasantly pieces out this suggestion. "She was young, handsome, sprightly, loving," he declares, writing of her in the Autobiography under the name of Ännchen. "I saw her daily without hindrance; she helped to prepare the meals which I enjoyed; she brought, in the evening at least, the wine which I drank, and indeed our select club of noonday boarders was a warranty that the little house, which was visited by few guests, except during the fair, well merited its good reputation." In the evenings Goethe played the flute to accompany Ännchen's brother Peter on the piano, and occasionally the whole company gave private theatricals¹ with Goethe and the pretty maiden cast in the lovers' rôles. At first they loved each other devotedly *outside* the play, also, but soon each got to be jealous of the other — without adequate cause — and "there were terrible scenes between us in which I gained nothing," records Goethe with delightful naïveté. "Then for the first time I felt that I truly loved her and could not bear to lose her. My passion grew and assumed all the forms of which it is capable under such circumstances; nay, at last I even took up the rôle which she had hitherto played. I sought

¹ Corona Schröter was another member of this amateur theatrical company, playing, on one occasion, the heroine in Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, a piece in which Goethe acted the Sergeant Werner.

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

everything possible, in order to be agreeable to her . . . for I could not renounce the hope of winning her again. But it was too late. I had lost her really."

How greatly Goethe suffered from the violence of his passion during the time that he was in love with Kätchen we may gather from letters about the affair which he sent to his friend Behrisch. One, dated November 10, 1767, sounds like the ravings of a madman. "Love be damned," is one sentence, and soon there follows: "I am mad. If my hands were in chains, I should know what to bite. . . . I have made me a pen to regain control of myself. Let us see if we can get on. My loved one! Ah! she will be mine for ever. You see, Behrisch, I feel it in the very moment when she makes me furious. Heavens! Heavens! Why must I love her so? . . . But I will tell you everything in order.

"On Sunday, after dinner, I went to see Doctor Hermann and came back to the Schönkopfs' at three. She had gone to the Obermanns'; for the first time in my life I wished I were there, also, but I knew of no excuse and so decided to go to the Breitkopfs'. I went, but was not in a peaceful frame of mind. Hardly had I been there a quarter of an hour, when I asked Fräulein Breitkopf if she had not some message for the Obermanns about *Minna* [*von Barnhelm*]. She said no. I insisted. She said that

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

I might stay there, and I that I was going to leave. At last, angered by my requests, she wrote a note to Fräulein Obermann, gave it to me and I flew over. How happy I hoped to be! Woe to her! She spoiled my pleasure. I arrived. Fräulein Obermann broke open the note; it ran as follows: 'What strange creatures men are! — changeable without knowing why. Hardly is Herr Goethe here when he gives me to understand that he cares more for your society than for mine. He is forcing me to give him some message to you even if it does not amount to anything. In spite of my anger at him I am grateful to him for giving me an opportunity to tell you that I am ever yours.'

"After Fräulein Obermann had read the letter she assured me that she did not understand. My girl read it and instead of rewarding me for coming and thanking me for my affection, treated me so coldly that Fräulein Obermann and her brother could not help noticing it. This conduct, which she kept up the entire evening and all day Monday, gave me such offence that, Monday night, I fell into a fever, which racked me terribly through the night with hot and cold and kept me at home the whole day after. Well, Behrisch, don't expect me to tell it in cold blood. Heavens! — This evening I sent down-stairs for something. The maid came back

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

with the news that she had gone to the play with her mother. I had just passed through a chill and at this news all my blood was on fire. Ha! at the play! at a time when she knew that the one she loved was ill. That was terrible; but I forgive her. I didn't know what play it was. How? Can it be that she is at the play with them? With them! That made me tremble! I must know. — I dress myself and run like a madman to the theatre. I take a ticket to the gallery. I reach my seat. Ha! a new discomfiture. My eyes are weak and cannot see as far as the boxes. I thought I should lose my mind, was going to run home and get my glass. A poor fellow who was standing at my side rescued me from my confusion. I saw that he had two. I asked him, as politely as I knew how, to lend me one; he did so. I looked down and found her box — O Behrisch —

“ *I found her box.* She was sitting in the corner beside a little girl. . . . then Peter, then the mother. — But now! Behind her chair Herr Ryden, in a very affectionate posture. Ha! Fancy me! Fancy me, up in the gallery with an opera glass seeing that! Damnation! Oh! Behrisch, I thought my head would burst with rage. They were playing *Miss Sarah* [*Sampson*]. But I could not see or hear anything. My eyes were on that box and my heart was palpitating. Now he leaned forward so that the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

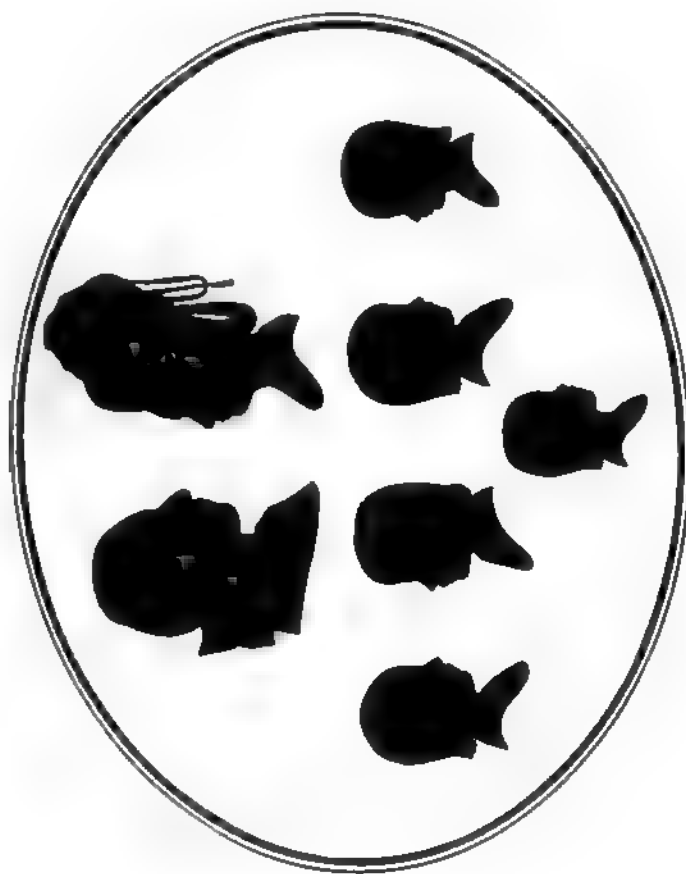
little girl who sat by her could see nothing. Now he stepped back. Now he leaned over the chair and said something to her. I gnashed my teeth and watched him. . . . Suddenly the fever came on me with full force and for a moment I thought I should die; I gave my glass to my neighbour and ran out of the house. . . . If you know a more unhappy man than me, with so much talent, such good prospects and such advantages, just name him and I will keep silent. . . . How shall I pass this night? I dread it. — I am very weak. To-morrow I shall go to see her. Perhaps her coldness toward me has abated. Good night. My brain is all in a muddle. Oh if the sun were only up again!" . . .

Yet, the next day, at a rehearsal of *Minna* they were alone for a quarter of an hour. "It takes no longer for us to become reconciled. In vain does Shakespeare say: 'Frailty, thy name is woman;' the image of frailty would more easily be found in a young man. . . . What yesterday made the world a hell to me to-day makes it a heaven." . . .

Characteristically, however, he soon turned into "copy" this experience of unhappy love, celebrating in *Die Laune des Verliebten* his ill-starred attachment to Ännchen. In this play Eridon represents the jealous Goethe, and Arnina his sprightly sweetheart. Another play, begun at this time, and reminiscent



AUERBACH'S KELLER, LEIPZIG.



CHARLOTTE, HER HUSBAND AND THEIR CHILDREN.
See p. 135.

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

of the Leipzig environment, was *Die Mitschuldigen*, a dramatic but unpleasant treatment of a landlord with unbridled curiosity, a son-in-law with unbridled avarice, and a guest-of-the-house with unbridled desires. The atmosphere of the piece shows that Goethe has now made the acquaintance of men and women of much lower moral tone than those we have heretofore met among his friends. And such was indeed the case. The scene in Auerbach's cellar, depicted in *Faust*, is probably a fairly close reproduction of certain wild orgies in which he and his Leipzig friends indulged at this period, and in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he himself tells us that his disappointment in the case of Ännchen led him into youthful excesses which soon seriously undermined his health. In the poems and letters of this date are to be found, too, numerous wanton and sensual expressions which make it clear that his life just then was, for the most part, far from elevating.

Yet he made one or two friends whose reaction upon him was and continued to be ennobling. Among these were Adam Frederick Oeser, Director of the Academy of Arts in Leipzig, whose influence upon Goethe's art-sense was purifying and permanent, and his eldest daughter, Frederica Elizabeth, a lively and intelligent girl, two years Goethe's junior, for whom he developed one of those

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

healthful and uplifting friendships of which he had so many (and with women, too!) throughout his long life. Frederica had always been her father's darling, the companion of his work as well as of his play, and she and Goethe had many interests in common of which they could talk and write. Moreover, he always sought her sympathy when tormented by love or jealousy and he listened with respect to her counsel at all times. For several years after his departure from Leipzig he carried on a regular correspondence with her, and on one occasion, as a mark of his continued devotedness to her, sent her the portrait of his much-loved sister Cornelia, hastily sketched on a proof-sheet of *Goetz*. To her, too, he dedicated a collection of songs with melodies. But he never made love to her.

The death-blow to Goethe's close relationship with Kätchen was unconsciously dealt by the lover himself, in the New Year of 1768, by the introduction to the Schönkopf establishment of Johann Gottfried Kanne, a Saxon by birth. Kanne, who was four years Goethe's senior, began at once a *bona fide* wooing of the pretty daughter of the house, and she, who had suffered much from Wolfgang's jealousy and was unable to see in his love anything except philandering which his return to Frankfort would soon bring to a close, encouraged Kanne's attentions.

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

Even the wretched Goethe was forced ere long to acknowledge that to this man Kätchen was giving real and deep love. His recklessness increased as his hopes of happiness grew less, and he soon had to pay the inevitable price of folly.

The breakdown in health which abruptly brought to an end his years of residence in Leipzig climaxed suddenly on a summer night of 1768. Late hours, much beer and coffee and periods of self-indulgence, alternated by attacks of asceticism, during which he carried out the precepts of Rousseau in respect to sleeping on a hard bed, with scanty coverings, proved too much for a constitution never over-strong, and when seized by the violent hemorrhage which marked the beginning of his long illness, Goethe had only strength enough to call to his aid the fellow student who slept in the next room. Medical assistance came promptly, however, and his life was saved. But for a couple of months he continued to be a very sick man, and not until September was he strong enough to bear the journey to Frankfort.

Back now in his boyhood home he remained for over a year, a far from comfortable invalid. Still, he was strong enough to write often and ardently to Ännchen, whom he had left without undergoing the pains of parting. To this fact he refers in one letter as follows: "I am sure you will forgive me that I

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

did not take leave of you. I was in the neighbourhood, I was even below at the door; I saw the lamp burning and went to the steps, but I did not have the courage to mount. For the last time, how should I have come down again? Thus I now do what I ought to have done then; I thank you for all the love and friendship which you have constantly shown me and which I shall never forget. I need not beg you to remember me. A thousand occasions will arise which must remind you of a man who for two years and a half was part of your family, who indeed often gave you cause for displeasure, but still was always a good comrade and whom it is to be hoped you will often miss; at least I shall miss you."

Often the letters which Goethe sent from Frankfurt to the Schönkopfs were addressed to the father of the family, whom he pictures as receiving them sitting "on the sofa by the warm stove with Madame in her corner at the desk, Peter beyond the stove, and Kitty in my place by the window." And even when they are addressed to the beloved maiden they frequently end, "Show this letter and all my letters to your parents. . . . I write as I have spoken in all honesty."

Yes, those were unmistakably the real love-letters of a youth anxious for a mate which found their

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

way to Leipzig from Goethe's sick-room in Frankfurt. In this affair of Ännchen, at any rate, he was in earnest. And please note, it is *he* who is forsaken. In less than a year from the time of his departure from Leipzig Fräulein Schönkopf has informed a friend of hers, who is also Goethe's friend, of her engagement to Dr. Kanne, and in due time Goethe himself hears the news. He then writes:

" FRANKFORT, 1st June, 1769.

" MY DEAR FRIEND — From your letter to Horn I have learned your happiness and seen your joy; what my feelings were, and what my joy was, you can imagine if you can still picture to yourself the great love I bear you. Present my regards to your dear doctor and commend me to his friendship. . . . The susceptible heart is one which loves the most readily, but that which the most readily loves, forgets the most readily. . . . Oh, it is a heart-rending sight to see one's love expire. A lover who cannot command attention is not nearly so unfortunate as a forsaken one; the first still cherishes hope, and at least dreads not hate; the other, yes, the other — he that has once felt what it is to be cast out of a heart that was altogether devoted to him, shuns even reflecting upon, much less speaking of such a subject. . . . Writing, particularly to you, has

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

grown distasteful to me. If you do not expressly command it, you need look for no letter from me before October."

Yet we find one dated "August 26, 1769," thanking Kitty for the interest she has taken in his health and declaring that only illness has prevented him from writing to her often! "It is a curious coincidence," this letter continues, "that a year ago to-day I saw you for the last time; it is something ridiculous that the face of things may be so changed in one short year; I wager that, were I to see you again, I should no longer remember you. Three years ago I had sworn it would have become otherwise than it is. We should swear to nothing, I maintain. Time was when I could not cease talking to you. Now, my imagination fails to provide matter sufficient to fill one side of a letter to you. For I can think of nothing that would be agreeable to you. When I once hear from you that you are happy, *altogether happy*, I shall be pleased. Do you not believe so? . . . Farewell, my dear friend. Give my regards to your mother. I am to-day in a sulky mood. Were I in Leipzig I would take my seat at your side and shew it in my looks. You may remember some such scenes of old. But no; were I beside you, how happy I should feel my existence. O, that I could recall the last two years and a half. Kitty, I swear

HIS LEIPZIG SWEETHEART

to you, my dearest Kitty, that I should act more wisely."

Four months later Goethe writes that though his body is restored to health, his mind is not yet healed. He also tells his beloved Kitty that he has had a dream in which he found her married. This proves to be a false alarm, though, for the nuptials have not yet taken place. Whereupon he declares (January 23, 1779) that he has now made up his mind to go to Strassburg, instead of returning to Leipzig, explaining that he has "no desire to see Kitty Schönkopf again unless under some other name.

"You are still the same estimable girl," this letter continues, "and will always be the estimable wife. And I shall remain — Goethe. You can comprehend that. When I mention my name I mention my all; and you know well, that ever since I have been acquainted with you I have existed only as one with you." That, with the inconsistency of a true lover, he still obstinately cherishes the hope he may, one day, call her his, this letter, none the less, makes quite clear towards its close. "What if, on bringing you the fan and neckerchief, I could still say Mlle. S. or Kitty S.! I should then be, also, a doctor, and what is more, a French doctor [he would have taken his doctor's degree at Strassburg], and after all there is a miserably small difference between Madame Doctor C.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

[Kanne is interchangeably spelled with a C and with a K] and Madame Doctor G. . . . Our arrangements here are excellent. We have a whole house. . . . If I marry, my parents and I will divide the house between us—I getting ten rooms all handsomely furnished after the Frankfort taste. To be sure, Kitty, it really looks now as if you would not have me. Well, then, court for me one of your acquaintances, whoever is most like you. What of my journey? In two years I am back again. Then. I have a house; I have money. Heart, what dost thou more desire? A wife." . . .

Kitty Schönkopf, however, was not to be this happy lady, for, two months after writing the above, Goethe learns that she has become Madame Doctor Kanne. So was snapped definitely the bond of yearning and hope which, for so long, had drawn him Leipzig-wards! Six years later, after he had fallen under the spell of Frau von Stein, happening to be in Kätchen's town, he called on the Frau Doctor. "Mais ce n'est plus Julie," he wrote to his Weimar correspondent, having in mind, no doubt, Rousseau's well beloved.

CHAPTER IV

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

JUST at the time when Goethe's "natural man" was clamouring most vehemently for the love of Kitty Schönkopf his spiritual nature was going through a series of deep and far-reaching experiences. The woman through whom these experiences came was the well-born and exceedingly intelligent Fräulein von Klettenberg, the most intimate friend of Goethe's mother, whom Lavater has sent down to posterity as "the Sabbath of his journey," and whom Goethe himself has described as the Word to his mother's Deed. "In her and my mother I had two incomparable companions," the Autobiography tells. "I called them Word and Deed (Rath und That); for when the former cast her serene, yea, blessed glance over earthly things, that which had perplexed the rest of us mortals readily unravelled itself before her, and she could almost always point out the right way, for the reason that she looked down into the labyrinth from above, and was not herself entangled in it; then, when a decision was once made we could

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

rely upon my mother's readiness and energy. As sight aided the former so faith came to the assistance of the latter."

Both Faith and Works were needed in a crisis which now arose (1768) and bound Goethe's soul with bonds of steel to that of Fräulein von Klettenberg. On Cornelia's birthday (December 7) he was attacked in his bedroom at home by a violent internal pain which none of the usual remedies availed to relieve. Cornelia, unable to bear the sight of her brother's agony, went away in despair and the Frau Rath, in her utter need, tried her old pious plan of opening her Bible at random and using as an oracle the passage upon which her eye first rested. Of infinite comfort to her was the text to which she was thus led: "Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria" (Jeremiah XXXI. 5). So much did this help her to joyous confidence that she began vehemently to demand a "demonstration" on Wolfgang of the new remedy by which Fräulein von Klettenberg had lately profited. The medicine to be used was a species of magic salt, to secure which the physician had to hasten home in the dead of night, but which, when finally administered, worked an immediate and very wonderful change for the better. At last the threatened suffocation was averted, and though the patient could not, for many

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

days, sit up in bed a quarter of an hour at a time, he was soon past the acutely dangerous stage of his illness and, after a few weeks of convalescence, became almost himself again.

During this period it was that the exquisite spiritual nature of Fräulein von Klettenberg, who from Wolfgang's birth had been a close friend of the family and who had been largely instrumental in his confirmation, five years earlier, exerted that tremendous influence upon the youth's expanding soul which continued throughout her life and found undying expression, after her death, in one, at least of Goethe's books.¹ When Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* had thrown into the form of the *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele* (Confessions of a Beautiful Soul) the Fräulein's letters and conversations, his mother copied a review of these pages from the *Theologische Annalen* and added the following words: "My criticism is Psalm 1 : 3, 'His leaf also shall not wither.' For it certainly did not occur to my dear Klettenberg that, after so long a time, her memory should still grow green and blossom, and bring blessings to after generations. Thou, my dear son, wast destined by Providence for the preservation and dissemination of these unfading leaves. God's blessing and a thousand thanks for it. . . ."

¹ Her influence seems to me to shine through *Faust*, also.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The real Fräulein von Klettenberg may not easily be distinguished, at this distance in time, from the ideal so beautifully painted by Goethe; but, since the commentators seem fairly agreed that the portrait in the *Confessions* is a remarkably faithful one, and as documents which have come to light since Goethe's death tend rather to heighten than diminish this view, we shall not go far astray in assuming that, in essentials, the two are virtually one. Varnhagen von Ense, into whose hands considerable information concerning Fräulein von Klettenberg happened to fall, implies that the facts of her life have been only slightly coloured in Goethe's rendering of them. "In the galaxy of beautiful personalities," he says, "which, like stars, shine out against the deep-blue ground of Goethe's life I have always felt especially attracted to two, who, though very different in the actual outward circumstances of their lives seem to have exerted much the same sort of ennobling influence upon the character of this man who was their friend. 'The two to whom I refer were Fräulein von Klettenberg and Corona Schröter.'" ¹

"But though Fräulein von Klettenberg is admittedly the original of the 'Beautiful Soul,' in *Wilhelm Meister* her *Confessions* there published," Von Ense continues, "offer one of the most wonderful evidences

¹ *Vermischte Schriften*, Vol. VI., p. 33 et seq.



FRAULEIN VON KLETTENBERG.



ECKERMAN.

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

that we have of Goethe's poetic genius because, even in this medium which appears to have been foreign to him, the poet shows himself not only quite at home but even a master. The most sensitive piety, with its delicate moods and impressions, appears in these *Confessions*, is given, indeed, not only literary form but actual life; so that this book may serve as a work of edification, is, in fact, often read for that purpose. The Count Leopold Stolberg separated the leaves which contain these *Confessions* from the rest of the book, had them bound by themselves and regarded them as a jewel whose connection with the ugly and, to him, repulsive contents of *Wilhelm Meister* he was not willing to admit. So much is certain: a more beautiful, more noble, more perfectly placid picture than this of true piety living happily amid the storms of the world could not have been painted against the background of conditions as there given. It was, in fact, not the proposition to depict a religious heroine, a spiritual prophet or martyr but a *still life*, a life, that is, which though it has to do with commonplace and even sordid circumstances, finds in religion a steadfast centre by means of which the other events of life may be coördinated."

Now it was exactly because Fräulein von Klettenberg was this kind of person — "in the world but not of it" — that she was able to be of such tre-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

mendous spiritual help to Goethe both at the period of his illness and subsequently. He and she were constantly engaged in religious discussion, but it was not particularly that which counted; nor, indeed, was it of such enormous importance that she led him definitely to connect himself with a religious organization. What did count, though, for him was contact with a life really close to the Eternal Source of Life, opportunity to breathe in the exquisite fragrance of a soul in sweet communion with God. Moreover, it was of immense importance to him that Fräulein von Klettenberg was neither a bigot nor a prude. Though there are one or two things in the *Confessions* which she, by no chance, would ever have written down with black ink upon white paper she was a tremendously flesh and blood woman. Not easily had she reached the place where communion with God was more precious to her than any of the joys of life or love. Goethe, therefore, knew that she would sympathize with him in his lapses from, as well as rejoice with him in his approximations to virtue. Consequently he could write her such a letter as this from Strassburg:

“ 26 August (1770).

“ GNÄDIGES FRÄULEIN: — I have been to-day to the Holy Communion, to keep in mind the passion

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

and death of our Lord; and you can guess why I am amusing myself this afternoon, and at last setting out in earnest to write a letter so long delayed.

“ We treat our best friends as we are accustomed to treat God himself; every love has its collectanea; and I would sooner that rejected brass tokens were again collected than scattered thoughts; and especially here, in the circumstances in which I am now.

“ And yet it is not little that they seem to promise me. The many people whom I see, the many accidents which cross my path, afford me experiences and knowledge of which I have never let myself dream. Moreover, my body is just robust enough to bear moderate and needful labour, to remind me occasionally that, neither in body nor mind am I a giant.

“ My connection with the religious people here is not exactly firm: at the beginning I turned myself very definitely towards them but it seems as if it could not be. They are so mortally prosy when they begin that my liveliness cannot endure it. Mere people of moderate intellect [they are] who thought rationally for the first time when religion seized them and now think that is everything because they know nothing else; withal so narrow-minded, orthodox

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

and methodical and so hostile to my Count¹ that I need just say nothing more to you. . . . The conceit of wishing to twist everybody's nose in the direction in which our own has gone! . . . How often have I heard my uncle, for instance, mix up the interest of his own whims and God's interests, as he was rebuking my cousin. I like the man — we are good friends; but even as father of a family he is too strict; and you can fancy what happens when he wishes to have the more subtle duties of religion observed by his rough young people.

“Another acquaintance, exactly the opposite of this one, has been of not a little use to me latterly. I must go through all the classes, it seems, dear lady. This man [probably Dr. Salzmann, tutor of the University of Strassburg, who presided at Goethe's *table d'hôte* and became his very intimate friend] has gone through much experience with a great deal of sense and out of the cool-bloodedness with which he has always regarded life, thinks he has found out that we are set in this world especially to be useful to it, and that Religion affords us some aid in fitting for this usefulness. He holds, also, that

¹ Count Zinzendorf, head of the Moravians, an order in which Goethe was at this time interested and whose philosophy Fräulein von Klettenberg later adopted.

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

the most useful man is the best and all that follows therefrom.

"The day after to-morrow is my birthday [his twenty-first], but a new epoch will hardly commence with it. However that may be pray with me, *for* me, that all may turn out as it should.

"Jurisprudence begins to please me much. Thus it is with everything as with Merseburg beer; one shudders the first time, but if one has drunk it a week one cannot give it up again. And Alchemy is still as ever my secret love."

This last sentence pleasantly bears witness to the fact that Goethe, though far away from his *Gnädiges Fräulein*, was jealously cherishing the absorbing interest in alchemy which constituted part of their bond. In the *Confessions* we hear very little of this bent of the lady's mind, but in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, the matter is developed at some length. The physician, whom the Fräulein had introduced to Goethe and who had helped him through his bad illness by the use of a kind of magic salt, was a pious Separatist in whose cures Faith appears to have played as great a part as any of the remedies which he applied. Whenever he found any susceptibility in a patient he recommended the study of certain chemico-alchemical books through which, he asserted, the novice might himself, perhaps, produce

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

the wonderful life-giving salt the mode of preparing which could not be communicated. Fräulein von Klettenberg had set herself to study the stipulated books and to work out experiments. "In the large, well-situated house in which she lived without parents or brothers and sisters she set up a little air furnace and alembics and retorts of moderate size," says the Autobiography, "and in accordance with the hints of Welling's *Opus Magocabalisticum* and the significant signs of our physician and master, operated principally on iron, in which the most healing powers were said to be concealed, if one knew how to open it. And as the volatile salt, which must be produced, made a great figure in all the writings with which we were acquainted, so for these operations, alkalies, also, were required, which, while they flowed away into the air, were to unite with these superterrestrial things, and at last produce, *per se*, a mysterious and excellent neutral salt."

Goethe, in his gable-chamber at home, also set up a small air furnace, after the salt had worked a miracle and saved his life for him. But, though he pored for hours over the stipulated books and worked for other hours with his furnace and his retorts, he did not succeed in getting any substance "which gave the least sign of anything productive in its nature, from which one could have hoped to

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

see this maiden earth pass into the maternal stage." Yet, even among the diversions of Strassburg, his interest in the subject continued, as we see, and many years afterwards, what he had read, thought and mulled over as a youth under the influence of Fräulein von Klettenberg, came out, as we know, in his great work *Faust*.

From the spiritual things which she had also helped him to approach he became pretty far removed as life went on with him and his experiences multiplied. But he never lost the capacity to appreciate her exquisite qualities of heart and mind and in the fruitful Frankfort period, which immediately preceded his departure for Weimar, he was in constant and very close communion with her. For Lavater¹ he drew a portrait of her, writing as he sent it, "She will be more to thee than I, though she is as much to me as to thee; but I, in my zealous unbelief, am ever the ME, and, as I am, thy Brother." Even Lavater, however, did not seem to Fräulein von Klettenberg to possess the faith of inward experience, that assurance that God was in Christ, which she never ceased to hope her dear Wolfgang

¹ Johann Casper Lavater (b. 1741, d. 1801) was at this time an intimate and valued friend of Goethe's. By vocation a Swiss pastor he was by avocation a physiognomist. He made many observations of the connection between the countenance of a man and the sentiments of his soul.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

would one day feel. When this Beautiful Soul, whose faith in him had been so great an inspiration throughout all the formative years of his life, died, just after Goethe had made that acquaintance with Karl August which was to mark the turning-point of his life, he was grieved beyond expression. All that she had hoped for him of opportunity for wide usefulness and great influence was now at hand but she was no longer there to talk with him about it and to share in his joy. The light in those heavenly-clear eyes was now gone out for ever. Happily, however, the meaning of their illumination had not been lost upon Goethe and, twenty years later, he interpreted it to the world. George Henry Lewes regretted that these *Confessions* were not published separately and maintained that they "interrupted the story [of *Wilhelm Meister*] in a most inartistic manner and really had nothing to do with the rest of the work." But it is precisely because Fräulein von Klettenberg was the woman which she was and actually lived in a world where almost any youth with the artistic temperament would have to pass through just such experiences as poor Wilhelm encountered that the poet placed the *Confessions* where he did. For, if the heroine of the *Confessions* was Goethe's dear dead friend, Wilhelm Meister was in many respects the youthful Wolfgang himself.

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

Fräulein von Klettenberg's father had been a chief magistrate of Frankfort. The father of the Fair Saint is, accordingly, shown to be a man of such position that he would naturally introduce into his home the men to be met with at Court. "I look upon it as providential guidance," his daughter declares passionately in the early pages of the book, "that none of these many handsome, rich, and well-dressed men could take my fancy. They were rakes and did not conceal it [the translation is Carlyle's]. This scared me back. They adorned their speech with double meaning; this offended me and made me act with coldness towards them. Many times their improprieties exceeded belief; and I did not restrain myself from being rude. Besides, my ancient counsellor [her old French teacher] had once in confidence contrived to tell me, that with the greater part of these lewd fellows health as well as virtue was in danger. I now shuddered at the sight of them; I was afraid if one of them in any way approached too near me.

So it was with a "stranger" that the girl in the *Confessions* is made to fall in love. But, as a matter of fact, the person there known as Narciss, — being called this in sport by reason of his exceeding good looks—was none other than a Frankforter born, Herr von Olenschlager, to whom Fräulein von Kletten-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

berg herself became engaged. The lover (in the book) had no objection to his fiancée's cultivating her mind and even sent her himself such books in the French language as she desired to see. But he insisted that all this should be kept "secret as forbidden love." For since learned women had been made ridiculous by Molière even well-informed women were not tolerated — apparently because it would have been uncivil to put so many ill-informed men to shame. On the whole the Saint found being engaged quite a valuable experience though. "If one could change the lovers of all honourable maidens into fiancés it would be a kindness to our own sex," she says, "even if marriage should not follow the connection."

Unfortunately, however, this indulgence in and exercise of the joys and cares of earthly love pushed far back in the Fair Saint's mind all thought of the God who had heretofore been so dear to her. "Earthly love concentrated itself in my soul, and put its powers in motion," she says. In a little while, indeed, she saw that she was wishing and desiring just exactly the things for which she felt herself bound to rebuke Narciss. "But in my own eyes, I was strong;" she adds, "I did not pray 'lead us not into temptation.'" And then there follows a marvellous illustration of Goethe's peculiar ability to put

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

himself into a woman's place and reproduce her viewpoint. (It would be exceedingly interesting to know exactly how much help he had, just here, from the letters of the real Fräulein.)

"Except Narciss," the Saint confesses, "the world was now altogether dead to me; excepting him there was nothing in it that had any charm. Even my love for dress was but the wish to please him; if I knew that he was not to see me I would spend no care upon it. I liked to dance, but, if he was not beside me, it seemed as if I could not bear the motion. At a brilliant festival, if he was not invited, I would neither take the trouble of providing new things nor of putting on my old ones carefully. . . . Thus was I often solitary in the midst of company. Yet by degrees I acquired some faculty to speak about my feelings and my thoughts with God."

The man she so loved did not care about communion with God, however. Indeed, he was rather inclined to scoff at such experiences and to lend his fiancée "writings which opposed with light and heavy weapons all that can be called connection with the Invisible. — But I used to read the books," she confesses naïvely, "because they came from him."

All this time there had been little said of a wedding between the lovers because Narciss had not yet

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

received the appointment by which alone he could think of undertaking the cares and expenses of a home. "But since now, by several unexpected deaths, some offices fell vacant which he might make pretension to, the instant was at hand when my whole destiny must be decided, and while Narciss and all our friends were making every effort . . . to obtain for him the wished-for situation, I turned with my request to my Invisible Friend. I was received so kindly that I gladly came again. I confessed without disguise my wish that Narciss might obtain the place; but my prayer was not importunate; and I did not require that it should happen for the sake of my petition.

"The place was obtained by a far inferior competitor. I was dreadfully troubled at this news; I hastened to my room, the door of which I locked behind me. The first fit of grief went off in a shower of tears; the next thought was, 'Yet it was not by chance that it happened,' and instantly I formed the resolution to be well content with it, seeing even this apparent evil would be for my true advantage. The softest emotions then pressed in upon me and divided all the clouds of sorrow. I felt that, with help like this, there was nothing one might not endure. At dinner I appeared quite cheerful, to the great astonishment of all the house. Narciss had

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

less internal force than I, however, and I was soon called upon to comfort him."

But now the time of real trial was at hand, the time when she was to discover that, for her, at any rate, no lasting happiness was to be found while she was obeying the calls of the world. "Gladly would I have left things standing," she says, "and lived from day to day, floating with the stream like other people whom I saw quite happy; but I durst not; my inmost feelings contradicted me too often. Yet it was not in my power to renounce society and alter my relations to others. I was hemmed in as by a ring drawn round me; certain connections I could not dissolve; and, in the matter which lay nearest to my heart, fatalities accumulated and oppressed me more and more. I often went to bed with tears and, after a sleepless night, arose again with tears: *I required some strong support and God would not vouchsafe it to me while I was running with the cap and bells.*"

If she gave up society she knew that she would mortally offend Narciss, who greatly enjoyed parties and plays and had a horror, as men of his stamp usually do, of anything which looks like "strait-laced conscientiousness," on the part of a loved one. His sweetheart, therefore, schooled herself, for a while, to pretend interest in these things. But he

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

soon found out that the woman who was to be his wife was made of finer stuff than the other women he had known, — and with this realization he began to cool perceptibly. On her part, though she still loved him tenderly, she gradually came to see that a choice between his love and that of her Invisible Friend was inevitable. “If he would but leave my conscience undisturbed, then I was still his,” the *Confessions* declare; “wanting this condition I would have refused a kingdom with him.” The definite break was at hand.

Just how this break came about in Fräulein von Klettenberg's own case is very interesting. “She early saw through the character of Herr von Olen-schlager,” says the authority already quoted, “and knew a long time before that he would withdraw from her. She, indeed, said this many times to him and begged that he would give her at least this degree of fair dealing: that when he felt attracted to another woman he would tell her himself and not leave her to find the thing out from someone else. Disturbed and embarrassed, he gave his promise, protesting however, all the while, that such was by no means then the case; but immediately, because of his bad conscience, he added an oath to the effect that if he was not then speaking the truth might his first son be born deaf and blind.

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

“Fräulein von Klettenberg shuddered at this oath, which she deeply regretted hearing from his lips; but she did not trust him and from that time on saw him no more. After a little while he married, just as Narciss in the *Confessions* does, a woman well suited to him in worldly goods and in temperament. And it is a terrible fact that, when his first-born child came into the world, he was found to be both deaf and blind.”

So did this young, beautiful and still desirable woman come to be known as one who “valued God above a bridegroom.” But she was now happy as she had never been before. “After a stormy March and April the loveliest May weather seemed to be allotted to me,” she declares. Not that her struggles were over for good; she was by no means one whom the temptations of the flesh could not touch. Soon there came along a man who resembled Narciss but who for her had this additional attraction: that he was in spiritual aspiration and in temperament the mate she would have chosen for herself above all others. He, however, could not marry her, though he loved her.¹ So for her the fight with herself began anew. Actual sin had not before touched her life but now she felt its terrific force “by experi-

¹The implication is that he was one of those against whom her old French teacher had warned her.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ence " (that is, through intense sympathy with his experience) and she knew that nothing but faith could give her the pure heart for which she ardently longed.

" The sole question with me now was: What medicine will cure this malady? The practice of virtue? I could not for a moment think so. For ten years already I had practised more than mere virtue; and the horror now first discovered had, all the while, lain hidden at the bottom of my soul. Might they not have broken out with me as they did with David when he looked on Bathsheba? Yet was not he a friend of God and was not I assured in my inmost heart that God was my friend? "

And then there came home to her, in studying the songs of David, the tremendous truth which underlies the Incarnation and she began to pray as she had never before prayed in her life, " Now, gracious Father, grant me faith." And because she was then "in the condition in which we seldom are, but in which we are required to be if God is to regard our prayers," faith, like an illumination, came to her. To the heroine of the *Confessions* as to Fräulein von Klettenberg herself the teachings and practices of Count Zinzendorf¹ were, from this time on, of

¹ Nicholas Lewis, Count of Zinzendorf (b. 1700, d. 1760), became the patron and later the bishop of the Moravians, whose village, near

THE FRIEND WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

great help and inspiration. But she never withdrew herself from the world. Instead she was just a devoted daughter, a self-sacrificing spinster aunt, and an unselfish friend to the many who greatly needed her care in these various capacities. She learned, as she herself put it, "to mingle seriously in worldly matters and to practise what of old she had but sung." But in all her spiritual development there was no compulsion and that is the best of it. "I scarcely remember a commandment," one reads in the final paragraph of the *Confessions*; "to me there is nothing that assumes the aspect of law; it is an impulse that leads me and guides me always aright. I freely follow my emotions and know as little of restraint as of repentance."

For this Fair Saint, this Beautiful Soul, in a word Fräulein von Klettenberg, had demonstrated that she could be in the world but not of it. And she could further say, as Paul did, that, by virtue of a love¹ which was at once all-powerful and all-satisfying, she was "constrained" to goodness. Small wonder that the tempest-tossed soul of Goethe

the Hutberg, was called Herrnhut, the Lord's pasture-ground. It was in this place that he died after having lived for many years in England and visited America twice.

¹ Cf. Goethe's own remark: "As soon as one has understood and absorbed into one's self the pure doctrine and love of Christ one feels one's self great and free."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

felt itself soothed and uplifted by contemplation of such a life, and that the poet in the man never ceased to give thanks for the friendship of this " New England nun " of a woman.



STRASSBURG CATHEDRAL.



VIEW FROM STRASSBURG CATHEDRAL.

CHAPTER V

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

It was a youth refined by recent religious experience, saddened by unrequited love, and sobered by an illness which had brought him to the very brink, as he believed, of the grave, who now set out to win at Strassburg the degree of Doctor of Laws.

For a man only just turned twenty, Goethe had already lived a good deal and we may well believe that, with his handsome face and his "interesting" look, he attracted many admiring glances as he descended, on April 2, 1770, at the hotel *zum Geist* and, to stretch his legs and get the air, after his long journey in a musty diligence, set forth to visit the famous Strassburg Cathedral. From its great height he looked down with keen pleasure on the buildings and streets of the picturesque town, which was now to be his home. Happily we may hear in his own words how it all impressed him.¹ "When I first perceived this Colossus of a Cathedral through the narrow lanes and then stood

¹ *Dichtung und Wahrheit.*

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

too near before it in the cramped little square, it made upon me an impression quite of its own kind, which I, being unable to analyze it on the spot, carried with me only indistinctly for this time, as I hastily ascended the building, so as not to neglect the beautiful moment of a high and cheerful sun, which was to disclose to me at once the broad and rich surrounding country. And now, as from the platform, I saw before me . . . the handsome city and the wide-spreading meadows around it, thickly set and interwoven with magnificent trees, all having that striking richness of vegetation which follows in the windings of the Rhine, . . . I blessed my fate that it had assigned me, for some time, so very beautiful a dwelling place."

The lodgings he took were at number 80 on the south side of the Fish-Market, a fine long street where there was constant passing to and fro to entertain and divert him. For though this youth was ostensibly in the University for the purpose of studying law he could not, for the life of him, help being interested in the aspects of things and in that colour and movement which so powerfully appeals to a developing literary sense. It was arranged that he should take his meals at a *table d'hôte* kept by two maiden ladies named Lauth at the Kramer-gasse, number 13, and this proved to be a very

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

happy decision inasmuch as the head of the table was Dr. Salzmann, a clean old bachelor of about fifty, who, though he had long been a coach at the University, had not lost a faculty for getting close to the heart of youth. He promptly became one of Goethe's most valued friends. Through Salzmann the engaging youth soon came to know many families in the town and they made him welcome in their Strassburg homes and in their country places outside the city. Because of these social affiliations he now felt the need of learning to waltz, just as earlier, in Leipzig, he had come to see that card-playing and polite deportment must be added to his list of accomplishments.

Goethe's father, martinet though he was, had taught his children something of dancing, but Wolfgang had never yet learned to waltz, and as at Strassburg "one sauntered by no pleasure-ground on Sundays and week days without finding there a joyous crowd assembled and, for the most part, revolving in a circle," he soon came to feel that he must add this dance to his list. Moreover, private balls were being given in the countryhouses and people were already talking of the brilliant masquerades of the coming winter. In order not to be quite out of all this, our poet must needs learn to waltz. The story of how he learned and of the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

sentimental catastrophe which thereby befell is told at great length in the Autobiography. "A friend who waltzed very well," he records, "advised me to practise myself first in parties of a lower rank so that afterwards I might be worth something in the highest. He took me to a dancing master who was well known for his skill; . . . I paid him a month in advance and received twelve tickets, for which he agreed to give me certain hours' instruction. . . . One circumstance greatly facilitated this. The dancing master had two daughters, both pretty and both under twenty. Having been instructed in this art from their youth upwards, they showed themselves very skilful and might have been able, as partners, soon to help even the most clumsy scholars into some cultivation." Their willingness to assist Goethe was considerably heightened by the fact that they fell in love with him. He found them both agreeable enough, but though the elder daughter was rather more handsome than the younger one, the latter suited his taste better and he was always a little sorry, therefore, when she yielded her turn as partner to her sister Lucinda.

One day a fortune-teller visited the house and in the course of her ministrations told Lucinda that she "ardently loved one who did not love her in return." At about the same time, Emilia, the younger sister,

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

though already pledged to a worthy youth felt herself so attracted by Goethe, that she told him the lessons would better cease before Lucinda's passion for him and jealousy of her became too violent.

" ' And do you, Emilia, give me this advice to avoid your house? ' I asked.

" ' Yes, I do,' she answered, ' but not for myself. Only listen. When you hastened away, the day before yesterday, I had the fortune-teller cut the cards for you and the same result came three times, each time more emphatically. You were surrounded by everything good and pleasing, by friends and great lords, and there was no lack of money. . . . It might be possible for your presence to become more important to me than hitherto and what kind of a situation would you be in between two sisters, one of whom made you unhappy because of your affection, and the other because of your coldness; and all this ado about nothing and only for a short time. For if we had not known already who you are and what are your expectations the cards would have placed it before my eyes in the clearest manner. Fare you well,' said she, and gave me her hand. I hesitated. ' And now,' said she, leading me towards the door, ' in order that it may really be the last time we shall speak to each other, take what I would have otherwise denied you.' She fell upon my neck

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

and kissed me most tenderly. I embraced her and pressed her to my bosom.

“At this moment the side door flew open and her sister, in a light but becoming night-dress, sprang out and cried, ‘You shall not be the only one to take leave of him.’ And Lucinda seized me, clasped herself fast to my heart, pressed her black locks upon my cheeks and remained in this position for some time. And thus I found myself in the dilemma between two sisters which Emilia had prophesied to me a moment before. Lucinda let me loose and looked earnestly into my face. I would have taken her and said something friendly to her, but she turned herself away, walked with violent steps up and down the room for some time and then threw herself into a corner of the sofa. Emilia went to her but was immediately repulsed. Then from behind, she made me a sign that I should withdraw; but as jealousy and suspicion see with a thousand eyes, Lucinda seemed to have noticed this also.

“She sprung up and advanced to me, but not with vehemence. She stood before me and seemed to be thinking of something. Then she said, ‘I know that I have lost you, I make no further pretensions to you. But neither shall you have him, sister.’ With these words she grasped me tightly by the head thrusting both hands into my locks, and pressing

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

my face to hers, kissed me repeatedly on the mouth. 'Now,' cried she, 'beware my curse. Woe upon woe, for ever and ever, to her who kisses these lips for the first time after me.' "

With these terrible words re-echoing in his ears Goethe flew down the stairs firmly determined, we do not need to be assured, never to enter that house again. But he did not forget the curse, as we shall see.

One other very moving experience — though of quite a different sort from the melodrama with the dancing master — in which Goethe participated early in his Strassburg stay, was that connected with the passage through the town of the ill-starred Marie Antoinette, then on her way to Paris to become the bride of Louis XVI. For her reception in the city a building had been erected on a small island of the Rhine and this was adorned with tapestries upon which had been worked the story of Jason's marriage to Medea. All the ideas which Goethe had imbibed from Oeser were shocked by this selection and, regardless of bystanders, he exclaimed, "Is there among the architects and decorators no one man who understands that pictures *represent* something, that they work upon the mind and feelings, that they produce impressions and excite forebodings? Can they so thoughtlessly place before the eyes of a

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

young queen, on her first setting foot in her dominions, the representation of perhaps the most horrible marriage that was ever consummated? It is as if they had sent a ghastly spectre to meet this lovely, and as we hear, most joyous lady, at the frontiers." . . .

Afterwards omen-lovers remembered this dark foreshadowing of the young queen's destiny against which Goethe's poetic soul had recoiled. But at the time there was only envy of the lovely fifteen-year-old princess whose grace and beauty made captives of all who saw her in that triumphant progress through streets strewn with nosegays, spanned with arches and bordered by rows of garlanded maidens waiting to offer her the flowers of spring. "I still vividly remember," wrote Goethe, when an old man, "the beauteous and lofty mien, as charming as it was dignified, of the young princess. Plainly visible in her carriage, she seemed to be jesting with her female attendants respecting the throng which poured forth to meet her train."

In such a throng there must have been much more of contrast and variety than in most French cities through which the queen would pass on her way to Paris, for Strassburg still preserved much of its old German character and in spite of the importation of French fashions (rigidly followed by the upper

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

classes), the maidens of the *bourgeoisie* still wore their hair in one long plait down the back and went abroad in petticoats described by Goethe as "of picturesque but perilous brevity." He himself, in his desire to appear well in the society to which Salzmann had introduced him, took to the fashion of tying up his magnificent hair in a bag and affixing a false queue. This obliged him to remain propped up, powdered, from an early hour of the morning, and also to keep from overheating himself and from violent gestures lest he should betray the false ornament. "This restraint contributed much towards making me for a time more gentle and polite in my bearing," he declares, "and I got accustomed to carrying my hat under my arm." He also at this period became an excellent swordsman and rider. And, prompted by his desire to do all that his friends did, he began to learn to play the violoncello.

The number of these friends was constantly growing and, in the Autobiography, Goethe gives us an exhaustive description of several of them who were either students or frequenters of the *Gesellschaft* which Salzmann had some years before founded. Among all these three or four names are of special interest to us: first that of Jung Stilling, an uncouth youth who, having been successively a charcoal

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

burner, a tailor, and a schoolmaster, was now a member of a religious sect. In the earnestness of this man Goethe found the same quality which bound him to Fräulein von Klettenberg, and Jung, as may easily be understood, felt almost worship for the handsome youth who defended him from the ridicule of his fellows and was glad to talk to him of things spiritual. Herder and Lenz (of whom more anon) were also of the *Gesellschaft* company as was also Weyland, a native of Lower Alsace who boasted of family connections in the neighbourhood.

Weyland had often spoken to Goethe of a clergyman who, with his wife and two attractive daughters, lived near Drusenheim, a village about sixteen miles from Strassburg and, now that the golden October days were bathing with splendour all the surrounding country, he proposed that they should go on a horseback journey and incidentally visit the parsonage and the daughters. As they neared Drusenheim it was decided, in the spirit of mischief, that Goethe, who was now quite a figure of a man and rather fashionable in his dress withal, should, on this occasion, disguise himself as a shabby theological student. Accordingly the poet donned old clothes at the inn where they left their horses, and combed his hair primly over his ears. Then after rehearsing their parts somewhat the two started



FREDERIKA'S HOME IN SESENHEIM.
From a drawing by Goethe.



GOETHE AND FREDERIKA.
From the painting by Kaulbach.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

to walk across the meadows to Sesenheim and its parsonage, an old-fashioned and dilapidated, but very picturesque farm-house.

Only the old pastor was at home, the rest of the family being in the fields, but he welcomed them cordially and soon — Weyland having slipped away to join the others — Goethe was left alone to talk with him of parish interests and so at once to make a good impression. Presently the wife appeared and soon, too, the elder daughter came in, wondering a bit that "Frederika" had not already returned. Refreshments were served and then again they all waited and watched for "Frederika."

Presently she came, simply and quietly dressed in the national costume consisting of a short white full skirt and furbelow, a tight bodice and black taffeta apron. Her straw hat hung on her arm and lovely golden braids drooped on a delicate white neck. Moreover, she had merry blue eyes and a nose saucily *rétroussé*. The minute Goethe saw her he began to wish that he had not made such a guy of himself and was ill at ease. Weyland, meanwhile, chatted on volubly of uncles, aunts, cousins and the like, completely excluding him, as a result, from the conversation. Frederika, observing this, threw herself with womanly tact into the task of entertaining the unprepossessing student and, to their common

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

amazement, they soon found themselves getting on capitally together. Music was lying on the harpsichord; she asked him if he played, and when he confessed that he did she begged that he would play for them. Here her father put in that *she* ought first to give them a song and, without demur, she seated herself at the ancient instrument, and performed several pieces, including, I doubt not, the "Maiden's Prayer" of that particular time and place. After that she began to sing. But soon she broke off with the remark, "If I sing badly it is not the fault of my harpsichord nor of my teacher; let us go into the open air and then you shall hear my Alsatian and Swiss songs." So out of doors they went and soon her merry voice was carolling

"I come from a forest as dark as the night,
And believe me, I love thee, my only delight.
Ei ja, ei ja, ei ei ei, ja, ja, ja."

Goethe had just been reading the *Vicar of Wakefield* and he was enchanted with a family that seemed to him so exactly like that which Goldsmith has immortalized. In the Autobiography, where the story of this Beatrice-love is told with exquisite tenderness and poetic charm, the elder of the three daughters at home (one had already married and gone away) is almost constantly referred to as Olivia, the Parson being identified with the good

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

Vicar himself. In the course of the merry supper which they all enjoyed together, on the evening of that first meeting, a youth suddenly came into the room and involuntarily Goethe exclaimed, "What! Moses, too." Weyland, at this point, proposed a walk in the moonlight; it looked to him as if his friend was about to betray his disguise. So he set the example by offering his arm to Salome, aged twenty-one, while Frederika, who, though about nineteen, looked several years younger, took Goethe's arm. Youth, moonlight and the caressing air of Indian summer, — what more need one say? Already Goethe was wondering with a pang whether Frederika's heart was as love-free as it gave every evidence of being.

"Is she engaged?" he demanded of Weyland as soon as the two had retired for the night. What a relief to hear his friend's chaffing answer: "Not yet." His haste to see her again, when he should be free of his ugly disguise, was such that he was all for riding back to Strassburg early next morning to get his finest clothes. But on the way another plan suggested itself and, exchanging costumes at the Drusenheim inn with the landlord's son, a youth about his own size, he corked his eyebrows, imitated the son's bearing and speech and hurried back to the parsonage with a cake for his hospitable hostesses.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Frederika, with the dew of morning on her cheek, recognized him at once, of course, and he was soon begging forgiveness for this jest as well as that of the day before. In a quarter of an hour the two were laughing and talking together as if they had known each other for years.

And so he stayed on a few days at Sesenheim, falling every hour deeper and deeper in love with the winsome golden-haired maiden and charming the whole family by his affability, his gaiety and his poetic gifts. Strassburg and his studies awaited him, however, and too soon he had to say farewell. But it was arranged that he should come again ere long. And of course he had to write.

The only surviving letter of the many which passed between Frederika and Goethe, after his departure from Sesenheim October 14, 1770, is that which he sent her the following day. All the others were burned by Frederika's elder sister in the chagrin of a later hour. This one, however, runs:

"DEAR NEW FRIEND: — I dare to call you so for if I can trust the language of eyes, then did mine in the first glance read the hope of this new friendship in yours, — and for all our hearts I will answer. You, good and gentle as I know you, will you not show some favour to one who loves you so?

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

" Dear, dear friend, that I have something to say to you there can be no question; but it is quite another matter whether I exactly know wherefore I now write, and what I may write. Thus much I am conscious of by a certain inward unrest; that I would gladly be by your side; and a scrap of paper is as true a consolation and as winged a steed for me here in noisy Strassburg, as it can be to you in your quiet, if you truly feel the separation from your friend.

" The circumstances of our journey home you can easily imagine if you marked my pain at parting and how I longed to remain behind. Weyland's thoughts went forwards, mine backwards, so you can understand that our conversation was neither lively nor copious.

" At the end of the Wanzenu we thought to shorten our route and found ourselves in the midst of a morass. Night came on; and we only needed the storm which threatened to overtake us, to have had every reason for being fully convinced of the love and constancy of our princesses. [An allusion, doubtless, to characters in a tale they had all enjoyed together.]

" Meanwhile, the scroll which I held constantly in my hand, fearful of losing it, was a talisman, which charmed away all the perils of the journey.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

And now? Oh, I dare not utter it, either you can guess it or you will not believe it.

"At last we arrived, and our first thought, which had been our joy on the road, was the project soon to see you again.

"How delicious a sensation is the hope of seeing again those we love. And we, when our coddled heart is a little sorrowful, at once bring it medicine and say: 'Dear little heart, be quiet, you will not long be away from her you love; be quiet, dear little heart.' Meanwhile we give it a chimera to play with and it is as good and still as a child to whom the mother gives a doll instead of the apple it must not eat. . . .

"You were not inclined to believe that the city bustle, contrasted with your sweet country joys, would be distasteful to me. And yet Strassburg never seemed so vacant as it does now. I hope, indeed, it will please me better when the remembrance of our charming hours together is a little dimmed by time and when I no longer feel so vividly how good, how amiable my new friend is. Yet could I or would I forget that? No. I will rather keep my slight heartache and write to you often. And now many thanks and many sincere remembrances to your dear parents. To your dear sister many hundred . . . what I would so willingly give you again."



GOETHE.

From the portrait by Rabe, in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.



FREDERIKA AWAITING GOETHE.
From the painting by Kaulbach.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

A few days after this Goethe's friend, Herder, underwent a difficult operation upon his eyes and during the time of his illness Goethe was with him constantly. But just as he had concealed his interest in alchemy from those near and dear to him, he now concealed from Herder and his other friends this secret passion which was deliciously tormenting him. Meanwhile letters, books and sketches went constantly to Frederika, and, in November, he was again at Sesenheim. Though it was already night when he arrived he could not wait until morning before going over to the parsonage, particularly after the landlord told him that the young ladies had gone home to welcome a guest they were expecting. Fierce jealousy of this guest seized him and he resolved to go over and "surprise" them. But they were not surprised. "Did I not say so? Here he is," he heard Frederika whisper as he approached. Her loving heart had said he would come and had even named the hour!

The next day was Sunday and early he and Frederika went off by themselves for a walk. All too soon their rapt joy at being together was broken by the sound of the distant church-bell calling them to worship and to the "Vicar's" sermon. Of course they went promptly if reluctantly. Frederika was a

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

parson's daughter and knew her duty well. And now as Goethe, by her side, saw her sweet lips murmuring the prayers of the service the memory of the last time a woman's lips had been pressed upon his struck into his heart like the thrust of a sharp knife. *For he feared the curse.* In games of forfeits, which were a feature of the social life of that time, kisses were a very common medium of barter, but he had taken good care not to kiss Frederika, though we cannot doubt that he wanted to do so. He had scrupulously limited to letters, gifts and poetry his ardent and ever-increasing love. Two little poems, which have been preserved, are addressed to the two sisters and refer, one to a visit soon to be paid despite the harshness of winter — "*ich komme bald, ihr goldne Kinder*" — and the other to an evening ride from Sesenheim to discharge some little commission the girls had laid upon him. At Christmas he was probably again at the parsonage, and Duentzer believes that it was at this time that he gave Frederika the book of songs which he made by putting his own words to well-known airs.

During the first three months of the new year (1771) the correspondence between the two continued to grow constantly more affectionate. It is highly probable that Goethe went to Sesenheim for Easter, and inasmuch as, in that neighbourhood,

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

Easter Monday was marked by great family gatherings it is exceedingly probable that at this juncture he for the first time forgot the curse and kissed his maiden right heartily. The little poem which he wrote on this occasion has in it, however, a note of foreboding. It is too delicate to bear translation, so I will give it in the German:

“ Jetzt fühlt der Engel was ich fühle,
Ihr Herz gewann ich mir beim Spiele,
Und sie ist nun von Herzen mein.
Du gabst mir, Schicksal, diese Freude,
Nun lass auch Morgen sein wie Heute,
Und lehr' mich ihrer würdig sein.”

For though the kiss was part of a game of forfeits he had learned in it, beyond possibility of doubt, that Frederika was wholly his.

So he returned to Strassburg, if not actually betrothed, yet in the position of an accepted lover. He knew now that Frederika loved him and he thought he loved her. So, for the present at any rate, they would be happy without troubling at all about such matters as the consent of absent parents. Meanwhile there was Goethe's real business in Strassburg to be remembered, the doctor's degree he was there to earn. The Sesenheim visits had sadly interrupted this pursuit heretofore, but we now find him working steadily at his studies.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Yet if he did not now go to Sesenheim all that counted in Sesenheim came to him. Frederika's mother presently brought her two daughters to Strassburg to visit a rich relative and, since Goethe was an *habitué* of the house where they were guests, he had many opportunities of seeing his dear one against a broader and more trying background than her own idyllic one. In the Autobiography he speaks of this Strassburg visit of his beloved as a test (Prüfung) of his love. And such, indeed, we can easily see it must have been. For inasmuch as he was the son of an important Frankfort citizen his position was almost that of a nobleman as compared with hers. And she was much too intelligent not to understand the implication of this. One evening, when to please the ladies he read *Hamlet* aloud, the young girl, he tells us, "drew her breath deeply from time to time and a transient flush passed over her cheeks." Very likely the similarity of her position to that of Ophelia in the play occurred to her and mayhap she read the lines

"For *Goethe* and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood."

It has earlier been remarked that, when Goethe was in love with one woman, he wrote enthusiastic letters to another about his turbulent

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

emotions. In Frederika's case this was less true than with many of his adored ones, because chiefly he sent his love letters to her. But he did make of Franziska Crespel and of Salzmann confidants in this affair, sending to the former, on October 14, 1770, a letter saying that he had just been spending a few days in the country with some pleasant people and adding that the society of the amiable daughters of the house, the beautiful neighbourhood and the most charming weather have greatly stirred him and made him very happy. Salzmann, however, is the chief recipient of his waverings concerning this love, and from letters which he sent his friend while staying at Sesenheim in May, 1771, for the ostensible purpose of curing a bad cough, it is clear that he knows well what he has to do and is struggling for the strength necessary to do it.

"For the honour of God," he writes, "I am not going to leave this place at present; and as I shall not see you for so long I think it will be well for you to write how you are. I am now tolerably well; the cough, by means of treatment and exercise, is pretty well reduced, and I hope it will soon depart. But things are not very bright round about me; the little one [Frederika] continues very poorly, and that makes everything look out of joint—to say nothing of

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

conscia mens, and not, alas! *recti*,¹ that follows me about. Yet after all it is the country. . . . Write me on Friday, and if you were to get a two pound box of nice sweetmeats (you know better than I what girls like to eat) packed and sent to me you would give occasion for sweeter faces than we have been accustomed to see for some time. Just send it to my address, to the arcade, care of carrier Schöll, early on Friday: he will see to it.

"I danced with the eldest [Frederika's sister] on Whit Monday, from two in the afternoon till twelve o'clock at night, straight off without any intermezzos for eating and drinking. The Herr Amt Schulz von Reschwoog lent his drawing-room; we had secured some good musicians, and the fun was fast and furious. I forgot my feverishness and, since then, it has been better, too. You ought to have been there. The whole Me stepped in dancing. And yet, if I could say that I am happy, that would be better than all. . . . My head is like a weathercock, when a storm is brewing and the gusts are changeable. Adieu. Love me. You shall soon hear from me again."

His conscience continued to trouble him a good deal as he lingered on, delaying, because of Frederika's illness, the cruel blow which he felt he must

¹ Cf. Virgil, *AEN.* I, 604: *mens sibi conscia recti*.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

give her. By June he has got no further away than when he sent his letter of a fortnight earlier and the necessity of saying something to his friend prompts him to write:

“A word or two is at all events better than nothing. Here I sit ‘twixt the door and the hinge.’ My cough continues though certainly I am in other respects well. But one is only half alive when one cannot breathe. And yet I cannot come to town. Exercise and fresh air at least help what can be helped, without reckoning” — Here he breaks off, not trusting himself to speak of the real reason why he delays. And then he indulges in a curious outburst of eudemonics:

“The world is so fair, so fair, for him who could enjoy it. I am often vexed about it and often read myself edifying lectures about the Today, about this learning which is so indispensable to our happiness and which many a professor of ethics fails to grasp and none propounds well. Adieu, adieu. I wanted to write but a word to thank you for the sweet-meats and to tell you that I love you. Goethe.”

The *carpe diem* philosophy which our poet is here defending had, as a matter of fact, already been tried and found wanting at Sesenheim. That it is a doctrine quite inapplicable to love-affairs, he by this time knew perfectly. For Goethe, as well as

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Frederika, suffered keenly all through this time and for long afterwards. One has only to read his letters to Salzmann to understand this. Even at the end of the fourth week he cannot man himself to the needful resolve:

“ I am coming or I am not or — All this I shall know better when it is over than now. It rains without and within and the unpleasant evening winds rustle in the vine-leaves before the window, and my *animula vagula* is like the weathercock over there on the church tower: ‘ Turn thee, turn thee,’ so it goes on the whole day. . . . Yet I am learning Greek finely; for you must know that during the time I have been here I have so increased my Greek knowledge that I almost read Homer without a translation. And then I am four weeks older: you know that is saying a good deal for me, not because I do much but many things.

“ God bless my dear parents.

“ God bless my dear sister.

“ God bless my dear Actuarius.¹

“ And all good souls. Amen. Goethe.”

One suspects from these closing lines that letters from home had penetrated to his Sesenheim retreat and had stiffened his determination to depart — as soon as ever he could. Meanwhile, besides work-

¹ Salzmann.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

ing at his Homer he painted the pastor's coach — an old friend which he found still in the service when he came to make his retrospective visit, eight years later — and learned basket-weaving! Well might he write to Salzmann: "It is now about time that I came back. I intend, and intend, but what will intending do against the faces round me? The condition of my heart is peculiar, and my bodily health wavers through the world, which is more beautiful than I have seen it for a long time. The most charming neighbourhood, people who are fond of me, a round of pleasures. 'Are not the dreams of thy childhood all fulfilled?' I often ask myself when my eye feeds upon this horizon of delights. 'Are not these the fairy gardens for which thou didst yearn?' They are! they are! I feel it, dear friend, and I feel that one is not a whit happier when one attains what one has wished for. The make-weight! the make-weight! [Zugabe ¹] which fate throws into the balance for us at every happiness. Dear friend, it requires much courage not to be down-hearted in this world. As a boy, I planted a little cherry-tree in sport; it grew and I had the joy of seeing it bloom; a May-frost brought the joy and the blossoms to nought, and I had to wait a

¹ "The fly in the amber" seems as near an English equivalent of *Zugabe* as one may get.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

year; then the fruit grew beautiful and ripe but the birds had devoured the largest share before I had tasted a single cherry. Another year it was the caterpillars, then a greedy neighbour, then the mildew. And yet, when I have a garden of my own, I shall again plant cherry trees. . . .

“Farewell, and if you wish to see me soon send me a remittance to set me free for I have become firmly fixed here. Seriously, be so kind as to give the woman who brings this a *louis-d'or*; I had not prepared myself for so long a time. Write to me, please, and kindly put it into the letter, and give the bearer strict injunctions. Adieu, dear fellow, pardon me for everything. Your Goethe.”

Immediately after this, perhaps on the twentieth of June, just before the midsummer holidays, he tore himself away. The following letter appears to have been written on the eve of his departure.

“My eyes close, it is just nine. Delightful arrangement of things. Revelling yesterday night; lashed out of bed early today with plans. It seems as if my head were like my room — I cannot even find a scrap of paper but this blue. . . . Be satisfied until I see you again. Within my heart it is not wholly bright. I am too much awake not to feel that I am grasping after shadows. And yet, to-

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

morrow at seven o'clock my horse is saddled and then, adieu."

The questions with which Goethe's heart and mind were torn during those four weeks that he lingered at Sesenheim were indeed painful ones. It seemed to him that he must renounce his beloved if he would save both their lives from shipwreck, and while to us, looking back, this conclusion does not appear to be nearly so inevitable as he took it to be, — for we are pretty sure that, through the sweet domestic joys and poignant sorrows which would have come to him as the husband of Frederika, Goethe must have learned much sooner than he did, some of the necessary lessons of life, — to him it looked, we repeat, as if renunciation was his only course. For one thing, he had no means yet of supporting a wife and he well knew that his ambitious father would be exceedingly averse to a household over which a plain country maiden like Frederika should preside. It further seemed to him that he must choose between his free development and the possession of the girl he loved. "*In what a terrible state of mind I found myself when I heard them speak of marriage.*"¹ But we should not do him the injustice to say that he did not think at all of what Frederika would

¹ This significant sentence occurs in *Die neue Melusine*, — one of the tales Goethe related while at Sesenheim.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

suffer. It is perfectly plain that he thought much of her. He felt that she could never belong to another, — eight years later he wrote Frau von Stein that Frederika had loved him much more beautifully than he deserved, — and he loved her very tenderly if not enough. That he, in a way, despised himself for not “measuring up” when the great test came, is seen by the character of Weislingen in *Goetz*, where he deliberately stigmatizes his own weakness with regard to Frederika. Yet he held steadfastly to the artistic temperament’s point of view and his defence can best be stated by quoting Wilhelm Meister: “From my boyhood up it has been my wish and purpose to develop completely all that is in me, to make my own existence harmonious.” It was because this was his goal that Goethe made his first great renunciation, — a renunciation by which a noble woman, worthy of the highest happiness, was almost brokenhearted.

One of Goethe’s confidants in his unhappy love-affair was Rheinhold Lenz, a feather-brained youth of poetic gifts, who from hearing much of Frederika seems to have determined to see if he himself could not win her love. Lenz’s biographer¹ would have us believe that Goethe’s friend succeeded with Frederika quite as well as Goethe himself had done,

¹ See Gruppe’s *Rheinhold Lenz; Leben und Werke*, p. 10 et seq.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

but to support his assertion he presents nothing more convincing than letters in which Lenz declares such to have been the case. And he, poor youth! was soon found to be of unsound mind. That the young fellow went frequently to Sesenheim after Goethe's departure and got to be on friendly terms with the whole family is undeniable. That he further found Frederika glad to talk with him because he had recently been much with Goethe, is also a fact. And that he soon made violent love to her and became insanely jealous when she drew back, — certain that neither he nor anyone else could fill Goethe's place in her heart, — is all there is left to the story.

Goethe did not easily forget Frederika nor ever value lightly the love she had given him. His secretary tells us that while dictating the portion of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in which their happy days together are described he was often overcome with emotion. Once, in the years which had stretched between the writing of the Autobiography and his piteous farewell to her, he saw her (Sept. 25, 1779) and they passed a pleasant friendly evening together.

To Frau von Stein he then wrote: "I rode towards Sesenheim and there found the family as I had left it eight years ago. I was welcomed in the most friendly manner. The second daughter loved

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

me in those days better than I deserved, and more than others to whom I have given so much passion and faith. I was forced to leave her at a moment when it nearly cost her her life; she passed lightly over that episode to tell me what traces still remained of the old illness, and behaved with such exquisite delicacy and generosity from the moment that I stood before her, unexpected, on the threshold, that I felt quite relieved. I must do her the justice to say that she made not the slightest attempt to rekindle in my bosom the cinders of love. She led me into the arbour and there we sat down. It was a lovely moonlight night and I inquired after everyone and everything. Neighbours had spoken of me not a week ago! I found old songs which I had composed and a carriage I had painted. We recalled many a pastime of those happy days and I found myself as vividly conscious of all as if I had been away only six months. The old people were frank and hearty and thought me looking younger. I stayed the night there and departed at dawn leaving behind me friendly faces; so that I can now think once more of this corner of the world with comfort, and know that they are at peace with me."

One of the old friends about whom Frederika and Goethe talked with entire frankness, that moonlight evening in September, was Rheinhold Lenz, who had

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

been secretly plotting against them both. Possibly it is to Lenz that we should attribute the germ of a very ugly story concerning Frederika — for which there is, however, absolutely no basis of truth — which was first put into print by Nāke, a philologist, who in 1822 (nine years after Frederika's death) made what he meant to be a pious pilgrimage to Sesenheim, dined meditatively at the inn (grumbling that the bill was larger than he thought it should be) and then took coffee with the successor to Frederika's father in the care of the parish. After which he bore away a sprig of the jessamine which, in days long gone by, had been tended by the white hands of this sweet maiden. Yet, in the very book in which he records his poignant emotions on this occasion he sets down the tale that Frederika had been seduced by a Catholic priest; a story "got up" says Hayward¹ by "some injudicious partisan of Goethe to palliate his inconstancy, and resting on no foundation beyond the fact of her having brought up the orphan child of her sister." When Goethe became betrothed to Lili it was said by those interested to prevent this marriage that *he* had betrayed and then abandoned Frederika. Another malicious lie.

For Frederika's whole life is an open book printed on the whitest paper. When her father died (in

¹ In *Foreign Classics for English Readers*, edited by Mrs. Oliphant.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

1787) she and her sister Sophie opened a small shop at Rothan, in the Steinhil, where her brother was pastor; and in 1801, when her brother was transferred, she went to live with her brother-in-law, Pastor Marx, at Messenheim, near Lahr. Here she died April 3, 1813, having for many years been known to all the children of the neighbourhood as "Tante," and by them associated with angels by reason of her sweet, sad smile and the white garments she was wont to wear.¹

George Henry Lewes sets himself squarely² on the side of those who maintain that though Goethe did right to leave Frederika if he did not love her enough to make her his companion through life, it is far from being a foregone conclusion that marriage with the parson's daughter would have crippled the poet's genius by narrowing his sympathies. "Had he loved her enough to share a life with her, his experience of woman might have been less extensive," declares Lewes, "but it would surely have gained an element it wanted. It would have been deepened.

¹ In the later years of her life Frederika never spoke of Goethe, and though the second part of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, in which her story is told, appeared before her death, we have no assurance that she ever saw it. Her grave at Messenheim has been marked, since 1866, by a monument bearing the inscription:

"Ein Strahl der Dichtersonne fiel auf sie
So reich dass er Unsterblichkeit ihr lieh."

² See *Life and Works of Goethe*, p. 104.

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

He had experienced and he could paint (no one better) the peculiar tenderness of man for woman, when that tenderness takes the form of vigilant, protecting fondness. He knew little, and that not until late in life, of the subtle interweaving of habit with affection, which makes life saturated with love, and love itself become dignified through the serious aims of life. He knew little of the exquisite companionship of two souls striving in emulous spirit of loving rivalry to become better, to become wiser, teaching each other to soar. He knew little of this; and the kiss he feared to press upon the loving lips of Frederika, — the life of sympathy he refused to share with her, — are wanting to the fulness of his art."

That well-known novelist of our own time, May Sinclair, has written some verses which, with wonderful tenderness and insight, picture what may have been Frederika's emotions after her lover had said "Good-bye." Let me quote a few lines:

"No, sister, call me not, I cannot come.
Here in the summer stillness for a while
Love lives a quiet life in memory.
Here can I turn my keepsakes o'er, the books
He gave me once, the ribbons he himself
Painted for me with blue forget-me-nots
On a white background; and in my locket — ah!
One curl of his brown hair, so beautiful,
So fine.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Downstairs I keep my eyelids dry
When tears would ease them, swallow down my sighs
Lest they should hear; for when they see me sad
They sigh for company and hold my hand;
And when I break loose from them, their kind eyes
Follow me pitifully about the room.
And pity angers me that means reproach,
Perhaps of *him*. Who has the right to think
A thought against him? He who was my own
To praise or blame. And if I blame him not,
Who then shall dare to? "

She knows full well, the poem goes on to say, that Goethe was too great to be her husband and that it was quite right, therefore, for him to leave her. But she is glad none the less that he once cared for her and made her care for him. For, she declares, she would, if she had her life to live over again,

" . . . choose to bear the sting
Of vain desire and torturing memory,
Rather than miss the vision, ay, the dream
Of such a love."

So, at least, one very keen analyst of feminine emotions reads Frederika. And I think she hits the truth. For, though Goethe was nothing if not inconstant, he loved gloriously for the time being, and more than one woman whose life touched his

GOETHE AND HIS BEATRICE

seems to have sincerely felt that to have been loved by *him*, if only for a little while, was enough of happiness to compensate for a childless and mateless old age.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

THERE is no question but that, at the *time*, Goethe suffered quite as much, if not more, from his fancied passion for Charlotte Buff as from his very real passion for Frederika. Yet that this passion *was* fancied, and not the deep-seated emotion inspired by his Sesenheim experience, we have two fairly convincing proofs. First, that he substantially reproduced it in a book which all the world might read; and, second, that, in looking back upon it, he gave it in his autobiography this exceedingly prosaic paragraph: "What occurred to me at Wetzlar is of no great importance, but it may receive a higher interest if the reader will allow me to give a cursory glance at the history of the Imperial Chamber, in order to present to his mind the unfavourable moment at which I arrived." The adorable Charlotte blotted out by the history of the Imperial Chamber!

Yet at the time, as has been said, it was all very real, very poignant. Then Wetzlar meant the home of Charlotte Buff to him and that only. None the

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

less we should be careful in all this not to confuse Goethe with Werther. For the book-hero who loved Charlotte was a diseased spirit, not at all a man who could have weighed and balanced a love-passion, worked it out of the system through writing about it and emerged a considerably improved person by reason of the whole affair. Guizot once wrote an epigram about Werther which, just because it applies to Werther and not to Goethe, illustrates exactly what I am trying to say: "*Aujourd'hui l'homme désire immensément, mais il veut faiblement.*" Now though Goethe often had strong desires he always had a strong will. Thus he was able to come through an experience like Werther's with his brains in his head instead of blown out by a set of borrowed pistols.

"In the spring there came here from Frankfort a certain Goethe, by occupation a jurist, twenty-three years old, only son of a very rich father,¹ with the purpose, as his father thought, of gaining some knowledge of practice, but with the secret determination to study Homer, Pindar, etc., and to do whatever else his genius, habits of thought, and heart might suggest to him." This sketch of Goethe in a Wetzlar background was written by none other than Kestner, the original of Albert in

¹ Goethe's father was really only well-to-do, not rich.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The Sorrows of Werther. Kestner was secretary to the ducal legation at Bremen and he was betrothed to a charming girl, who presided over the home of Herr Buff, Steward of the Teutonic Order, a curious survival of German mediævalism. Buff had had sixteen children (!!) of whom Charlotte was not the eldest, but, being stronger and clearer-headed than her senior sister, Caroline, she had, for more than a year before Goethe's coming to the quaint little town, been acting mother to the nine other young Buffs who had outlived infancy.

Just as Goethe was not Werther Charlotte was not the sentimental maiden whom Werther died of loving. The real Charlotte was quite free from all enervating sentimentality, had very little culture so-called, and was perfectly happy washing and dressing and feeding her clamorous young brothers and sisters. She might have served, indeed, for a model of the three K's which the present Kaiser is forever exalting. In appearance she was attractive without being beautiful. She had blue eyes, a neat figure, an agreeable expression and unbounded vitality. No matter how her duties multiplied she seemed always to have patience enough and energy enough to turn them off easily. So far as was possible she made play of her work and there is no evidence that she found the management of so large a brood



CHARLOTTE CUTTING BREAD AND BUTTER.
From the painting by Kaulbach.



WERATHER AND LOTTE.
From the painting by Kaulbach.

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

anything of a burden. "It is well-nigh a miracle how she does it all," Kestner once remarked. For he was that rather rare kind of man who is capable of seeing that managing a house and mothering a brood of youngsters is no slight tax on a woman's strength and resiliency.

Like all true German maidens, Lotte ardently loved dancing and it was at a little ball, which some young people of the Imperial Chamber had arranged in celebration of Whitsuntide, that Goethe first became acquainted with her. Kestner, detained by official business, was unable to go out with the party and thus it was that Goethe called to take Charlotte along with his own partner, — who was her friend and his cousin, Fräulein Lange. As he entered the house he found its mistress, in ball costume, cutting bread and butter for her little brothers and sisters. Kaulbach's famous picture shows us Werther in the doorway, so we may as well describe the scene as Werther saw it, looking in:

"It was the most charming spectacle I had ever witnessed. Six children, from eleven to two years old, were running about the hall and surrounding a lady of middle height, with a lovely figure, dressed in a robe of simple white, trimmed with pink ribbons. She was holding a rye loaf in her hand and was cutting slices for the little ones all round, in propor-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

tion to their age and appetite. She performed her task in a graceful and affectionate manner; each claimant awaiting his turn with outstretched hands and boisterously shouting his thanks. Some of them ran away at once to enjoy their evening meal; whilst others, of a gentler disposition, retired to the courtyard to see the strangers, and to survey the carriage in which their Charlotte was to drive away. 'Pray forgive me for giving you the trouble to come for me, and for keeping the ladies waiting: but dressing and arranging some household duties before I leave had made me forget my children's supper; and they do not like to take it from anyone but me.' I uttered some indifferent compliment: but my whole soul was absorbed by her air, her voice, her manner; and I had scarcely recovered myself when she ran into her room to fetch her gloves and fan." The drive out, the ball, and the return may also have happened substantially as told in *Werther*. But two important facts are different in the story and in the actuality: Goethe did not yet know that Lotte was betrothed to Kestner. And Kestner, unlike the Albert of the story, did not stay away from the ball but came a few hours later.

This clever young Secretary of the Legation, eight years Goethe's senior, had already met the poet

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

under circumstances which he has vividly described in the draft of a letter intended for his friend, von Hennings: "Two or three weeks after Goethe's arrival in Wetzlar a friend took me for a walk to Garbenheim. I found Goethe there, lying on his back in the grass under a tree, conversing with some friends who stood around him, — an epicurean philosopher . . . , a stoic philosopher, . . . and a hybrid between the two — and thoroughly enjoying himself. They discussed many things, some of them very interesting. This time, however, I formed no other judgment of him than that he is no ordinary man."

None the less, it is from Kestner that we get the most informing picture that we have of Goethe between the Strassburg and the Weimar periods. It runs: "He has a great deal of talent, is a true genius and a man of character. He possesses an extraordinarily lively imagination and hence generally expresses himself in images and similes. He also says himself that he always expresses himself figuratively, and can never express himself literally; but that when he is older he hopes to think and speak his thoughts as they are. In all his emotions he is impetuous, and yet has often great power over himself. His manner of thinking is noble and he is so free from prejudices that he acts as seems best

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

to him without troubling himself about reputation, fashion or convention. All constraint is odious to him.

“ Children he loves and entertains himself with them a great deal. He is *bizarre* and there are several things in his bearing and outward manner which might make him disagreeable. But he stands well, none the less, with women, children and many others. For the female sex he has a great respect. In *principiis* he is not yet firm and is only beginning to strive after a definite system. To say something of this: he has a high opinion of Rousseau, but still doesn't blindly worship him. He is not what one calls orthodox, but this is not out of pride or caprice or for the sake of making himself different from other people. On certain fundamental things he will unbosom himself to a few; others he leaves content with their own ideas. Scepticism, to be sure, he hates, and he strives after truth and definite ideas on fundamental questions, even believes, indeed, that he is already convinced as to the weightiest. So far as I have observed, however, that is not yet the case. He does not go to church or to the sacrament and he prays seldom. He says he is not hypocrite enough for that. Sometimes he seems in repose with regard to certain subjects, sometimes just the contrary.

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

"He venerates the Christian religion¹ but not in the form in which our theologians usually present it. He believes in a future life and in a better state of existence. He strives after truth, yet values higher than the demonstration of truth, the feeling for it. He has already done a good deal, learned a great many things, read a lot of books; but he has thought and reasoned still more. His chief study has been *belles-lettres* and the fine arts; in fact he has had to do with every kind of knowledge except the so-called bread and butter sciences." On the margin of this rough draft Kestner added: "I was going to describe him but it will take too long, as there is a great deal to be said of him. In a word he is a very remarkable man."

So Charlotte also soon came to feel. Goethe had been smitten with her at that first meeting, and the next day he, very naturally, called to inquire how she found herself after an evening of strenuous dancing. The good Kestner obligingly tells us all about it: "Lottchen had at once fixed his attention. She has a very attractive face, though not regularly beautiful. Her glance is as bright as a spring morning, and especially it was so that day, for she loves dan-

¹ Goethe himself elucidates this point in one of his letters to Lavater: "I am by no means *anti*-Christian, not even *un*-Christian, but I am, indeed, non-Christian (*nicht-Christian*)."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

cing. . . . He noticed her feeling for the beauty of Nature, and her unforced wit, — rather humour than wit. He did not know she was betrothed. I came a few hours later; and it is not our custom in public to testify anything beyond friendship to each other. He was excessively gay (this he often is, though at other times melancholy); Lottchen quite fascinated him, the more so because she took no trouble about it, but gave herself wholly to the pleasure of the moment. The next day, of course, Goethe called to inquire after her. He had seen her as a lively girl, fond of dancing and pleasure; he now saw her under another and better aspect, — in her domestic quality.”

From this time on Goethe was constantly in Lotte's house where his arrival was always hailed joyfully by the children and where the big sister was wont to put him promptly at some useful occupation such as picking fruit or cutting up beans. He was never quite able to determine whether it was his good genius or his evil genius which sent him to Wetzlar. Shortly after his departure he wrote, “My genius was an evil genius when he drove me out to Volpertshause. And yet a good genius. I could not wish to have spent my days in Wetzlar in any better way.” At the time, certainly, the days were gloriously happy ones. The children all adored him

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

and he stuffed them with goodies, let them crawl over him and pull his hair, told them fairy-tales and did every kind of thing for them that would lessen Charlotte's burden and help to keep them happy. "Goethe is spoiling them!" the family physician complained. But the honest old Steward came to love him as a son. As, indeed, who in Wetzlar did not love him? "I know not what attraction it is that I must have for people," he makes Werther say on one occasion, "so many like me." In connection with which it is interesting to quote a remark of Goethe's mother: "It is the happy fortune of Doctor Wolf that all the people with whom he is closely associated love him."

Did Charlotte Buff love him? Goethe was a man much nearer her own age than her fiancé, Kestner, and he had beauty and fascination, both of which the excellent secretary entirely lacked. Yet Charlotte never for a moment wavered in the devotion to which she was tacitly pledged (there appears to have been no public betrothal as yet between her and Kestner), though all the while she gave to Goethe sympathy and warm friendly interest. A remarkable woman! Absolutely the *only* woman, indeed, so far as my own researches into Goethe's amatory ventures show, who did not succumb, at least in inclination, when this dangerously fascina-

]

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ting young poet made love. But it was precisely in this faith of hers to her own plighted troth that her great attraction for Goethe lay. Once, when his friend Born called his attention to the fact that the town was gossiping about him and Lotte, and added, "If I were Kestner I should not like it. What can it lead to? I presume you will separate them?" Goethe answered earnestly, "If she should deceive me and prove to be a common flirt, if she were to use Kestner as a screen for her manoeuvres in order the more securely to lavish her charms, — the moment I discovered *that* would be the last of our acquaintance. But I consider her an extraordinary girl."

That he was doing her considerable unkindness in trying to find out just how extraordinary she might prove seems never to have occurred to him, egoist that he was! Once, about the middle of August, he kissed her. Lotte told Kestner of it and they agreed that this indiscretion should be punished. "Accordingly, on the fourteenth, in the evening," runs Kestner's diary, "when Goethe, returning from a walk, came up to the house, he was treated indifferently and soon went away." The next day when he came to call late in the evening, "he found us sitting out in front of the door; his flowers were there untouched. He felt this and threw them away; spoke in similes. I walked with Goethe

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

through the streets till twelve o'clock that night; remarkable conversation, seeing that he was full of anger and had all sorts of imaginations, which we finally laughed at, leaning against a wall in the moonlight."

Obviously Kestner, also, was a remarkable person. His freedom from petty jealousy was truly noble and it was never forgotten by Goethe. As the two men came to know one another better they found much in each other's character honestly to admire. Certainly there can nowhere else in literary biography be found a more generous analysis than this of a triangular situation: ¹ "Although Goethe could cherish no hope with regard to Lotte and did cherish none, all his philosophy and inborn pride failed to enable him completely to suppress his affection. And he has qualities to make him dangerous to a woman, especially to one of feeling and taste; but Lottchen knew how to treat him so as to encourage no budding of hope, yet so that he must admire her way of acting towards him. His peace of mind suffered greatly; there were various remarkable scenes by which Lotte always rose in my estimation and he could not but seem a worthier friend; yet was I often forced to amazement when I considered into what strange creatures can love transform the

¹ Written by Kestner.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

strongest and — in other matters — most self-sustained of mankind. In general I was pained for him, and there arose within me many struggles of affection; for, while on the one hand I thought my power to make Lottchen happy might not be so great as his, on the other hand I could not endure the thought of losing her. The latter feeling conquered and in Lottchen I have never been able to perceive a shadow of the same conflict."

One other extract from this invaluable account throws still further light on the situation. "I am under no further engagement to Lottchen than that under which an honourable man stands when he gives a young woman the preference above all others, makes known that he desires the like feeling from her, and when she gives it, receives from her, not only this but a complete acquiescence. This I consider quite enough to bind an honourable man, especially when such a relation lasts several years. But in my case there is this in addition, that Lottchen and I have expressly declared ourselves and still do so with pleasure, without any oaths and asseverations."

So, though they were not really bound at all they considered each other very much bound. Surely a difficult situation to be ethically clarified by a poet on moonlight nights in midsummer. All through

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

that August of 1772, indeed, Goethe seems to have made little effort to do more than drift. When Lotte went to a neighbouring village to visit some friends he followed — informing Kestner by a note that same evening that he had done so. Ten days later, when Lotte is visiting at Giessen, Goethe finds it convenient to be there, also, and so is able to introduce his friend, Merck, to the woman who was just then the star of his soul. The latter wrote his wife that he found Goethe's Charlotte quite worthy of the praise which had been so lavishly bestowed upon her. He added that it would be a good thing if Goethe could be got out of her neighbourhood, and, the next day, he made a try at accomplishing this. But he did not succeed, of course. On this occasion as on similar ones before and afterward Goethe managed, *himself*, the matter of getting out of the neighbourhood — when he got good and ready.

August twenty-eighth was the birthday, as it chanced, of both Kestner and Goethe, the former being thirty-one and the latter twenty-three that year. Goethe was with Lotte almost all the day before, then Kestner came and they had tea and little presents together, after which the three of them sat around and cut up beans until midnight came and the birthday broke. Goethe

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

did not quickly forget that friendly ushering in of his twenty-fourth year, and two years later he wrote to Charlotte recalling the evening.

His birthday was always with him a day of self-examination and this was peculiarly true that summer he found himself at Wetzlar. For he knew now that he must flee.

As during the Sesenheim episode, however, he keeps postponing the painful moment. He is really suffering, as his letter of September 6 — which is full of pique because Lotte has refused to take a little excursion with him — shows.

The climax came on September 10. He had dined with Kestner at the garden inn and, in the evening, the two went together to visit Charlotte. Goethe appears to have firmly resolved that he would go away next morning without leavetaking but he had said nothing to his friends of his intention. None the less, the fact that this was in his mind led their conversation into unusually serious channels. Lotte happened to turn the talk to Life after Death, and Goethe, who was sitting at her feet and playing with the skirt of her dress as was his habit, spoke also of the Beyond. But while it was of her mother that Lotte was thinking, wondering whether she should recognize that dear one in the next world, Goethe's mind had leaped suddenly

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

to the distance that would soon be between these three living friends. In order not to betray his emotion he jumped quickly to his feet, kissed his hostess's hand, and, as he set out for home, exclaimed, "We shall see each other again, we shall recognize each other in whatever form we may be. I am ready to go, but if I were to say 'forever' I should not be able to bear it. Farewell. We shall see each other again."

"To-morrow very likely," replied Lotte serenely, for this was probably not the first occasion upon which the poet had made a solemnity of going home to bed.

Such was their separation. On reaching his room Goethe dashed off the following lines:¹ "He is gone, Kestner, when you receive this note, he is gone. Give Lottchen the enclosed note. I was firmly composed, but your conversation (they had agreed that whoever died first should, if possible, give information to the living about the conditions of the next life) has torn me asunder. At this moment I can say nothing to you but farewell. If I had tarried a moment longer with you I could not have restrained myself. Now I am alone, and to-morrow I shall leave. O my poor head!"

The note for Lotte ran: "I surely hope to return

¹ A. Kestner's *Goethe und Werther*, p. 44.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

but God only knows when. Lotte, how it moved my heart to listen to you, when I knew that it was the last time I should see you! Not the last time, and yet I am going away to-morrow. What spirit led you to that conversation? It gave me a chance to say all that was in my heart, but with me there was more thought of this world here below, of your hand which I kissed for the last time! The room to which I shall never return and your dear father who saw me to the door for the last time! I am now alone and may weep. I leave you happy and shall always remain in your heart. And I shall see you again. But not 'to-morrow' is never. Tell my boy he is gone. I cannot write any more."

After a night's sleep he was able to add: "I am all packed up, Lotte, and the day is breaking; another quarter of an hour and I am gone. Let the pictures which I forgot and which you will divide among the children serve as my excuse for writing, Lotte, as I have nothing to write. For you know all, — how happy I have been these days and that I am going to the dearest, best people. But why away from you? Yet it is so. It is my fate that I cannot in reality add to to-day to-morrow and day after to-morrow, as I may often have done in jest. Be cheerful under all circumstances, dear Lotte; you are happier than a hundred others; but do not be

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

indifferent, and I, dear Lotte, am happy that in your eyes I read that you believe I shall never change. Adieu, a thousand adieus!"

For Kestner's attitude at this stage of the game we have only to consult his diary. There, under September 11, 1772 we find, "This morning Goethe went away without taking leave. He sent me a note with some books. He had long since said that about this time he should take a journey to Coblenz, where the military paymaster, Merck, expected him, and that he should not say good-bye but set off suddenly. So I had expected it. But that I was, notwithstanding, unprepared for it, I have felt — felt deep in my soul. In the morning I came home from the office. 'Herr Doctor Goethe sent this at ten o'clock.' I saw the books and also the note and knew that it would say: 'He is gone,' and was quite dejected. Soon after Hans [Buff] came to ask me if he were really gone. Frau Lange had taken occasion to send word by a maid: 'It was very ill-mannered of Doctor Goethe to leave in this way without saying good-bye.' Lottchen sent back the reply: 'Why did you not teach your nephew better?'

"Lottchen, in order to be sure, sent a box, which she had of Goethe's, to his house. He was no longer there. . . . Every one of the children was

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

saying ' Doctor Goethe is gone! ' . . . In the afternoon I brought Lotte the note from Goethe. She was sorry about his departure, and, while reading, the tears came into her eyes. Yet she was glad he was gone, as she could not give him what he desired. We spoke only of him, neither could I think of anything else than him."

Ten days later Kestner happened to be in Frankfurt and there, while calling upon Schlosser, who had recently become engaged to Goethe's sister, he found the poet himself. " For me it was an indescribable joy," the good fellow writes. " He fell upon my neck and almost squeezed the life out of me. . . . Later we went out for a walk together."

If Goethe were the hero of a novel and not a mere poet-man (with a distinct propensity for getting the greatest possible amount of emotion and " material " out of every amorous adventure that came his way) this chapter would now end. For he has fled, as was his duty, from Kestner's betrothed, the magnanimous young Secretary has shown himself magnanimous still — and Lotte, having wept the few tears which she owed to the situation, has literally as well as metaphorically " gone on cutting bread and butter." Yet more there must be just because Goethe did not shoot himself but, instead, wrote an immortal book about a lover who did.

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to quote Thackeray's deliciously humorous version of that book.

Werther had a love for Charlotte
Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter.

Charlotte was a married lady,
And a moral man was Werther,
And, for all the wealth of Indies,
Would do nothing for to hurt her.

So he sighed and pined and ogled,
And his passion boiled and bubbled,
Till he blew his silly brains out
And no more was by it troubled.

Charlotte, having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter,
Like a well-conducted person,
Went on cutting bread and butter.

Though this is not an accurate outline of the plot-development in *The Sorrows of Werther* it may well enough serve here as such. For our concern is with the real people pictured in the novel rather than with the novel itself. What actually happened was that Goethe as well as Charlotte "cut bread and butter." That is to say he went quietly back to Frankfort, hammered his *Goetz von Berlich-*

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ingen into shape for the printer, and was soon interesting himself wholesomely in the pretty girls and the social life of his busy home-town. To be sure he did not cease to think longingly of Wetzlar and once, at least, he wandered back there. Charlotte's silhouette, too, occupies the place of honour in his room and to it he does various obeisances about which he keeps Kestner carefully informed. After Palm Sunday, April 14, 1773, the day of Lotte's wedding, he intends to bury the silhouette, he says, but the day comes and goes — and it still hangs in its place "and shall hang there till I die." When the first baby born to the Kestners is named after him he is duly delighted, and a visit from Charlotte's childhood nurse (in August, 1774) calls out this passionate burst of adoration: "You can imagine how much the woman was to me and that I shall take good care for her. If bones of saints and lifeless rags which have touched their bodies deserve adoration and careful preservation, why not the human creature who touched you, carried you as a child in her arms, led you by the hand, the creature of whom you, perchance, asked many a favour?"¹ The worship of Charlotte has become a cult, it will be seen.

Two incidents, however, helped to crystallize

¹ *Goethe und Werther* by A. Kestner, p. 213.

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

for him the experiences at Wetzlar of which he had been a part. One of these was the news of the suicide of Jerusalem which came to him late in the autumn of 1772; the other was his growing fondness for Maximiliane La Roche, who, in 1774, married Peter Brentano, a Frankfort merchant who was already the father of five children. Jerusalem had been a student at Leipzig when Goethe was there and, at Wetzlar, he had also been attached to one of the legations. The cause of his suicide was an unhappy passion for the wife of a friend. When the tragic news reached Goethe it made a deep impression upon him — and furnished him with the plot for his novel.

But though "Werther" was probably begun not long after Jerusalem's death it proceeded very slowly for several reasons. One of these was that Goethe could not seem to hit upon the right form for it. Another was that he was now immensely occupied with the La Roche family — particularly Maximiliane — to which his friend Merck had introduced him immediately after his departure from Wetzlar. A third reason was that he had set the fashion of skating in Frankfort and so spent on the ice many afternoons when he might have been writing. There is a charming story told by Bettina of a certain afternoon when Goethe borrowed his

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

mother's handsome, bright-coloured cloak to throw over his shoulders while he skated in the sun and the Frau Rath and Maximiliane admired his grace and agility. One has to take all that Bettina writes with considerable reservation. But this story is good enough to be true. It would have been very like Goethe to put on peacock plumes, just then, for Maxe La Roche.

Maximiliane La Roche Brentano had an interesting mother as well as an interesting daughter. Her name was Sophie La Roche, and those who like to look up literary curiosities may be interested to search out her novels, especially that known in English as the *Memoirs of Miss Sophie Sternheim*. The daughter of Dr. Gutermann of Augsburg, Sophie had been betrothed in her seventeenth year to an Italian physician, Bianconi, of Bologna, one of her father's students. All preparations had been made for the marriage indeed when Bianconi suddenly demanded that the children should all be brought up in the Roman Catholic church, instead of the daughters following the mother and the sons the father, as was then the custom in mixed marriages. Sophie's father, a zealous Protestant, was furious at this stipulation and, forbidding Bianconi the house, declared the whole matter at an end. Sophie herself was broken-hearted, but she none



GOETHE SKATING AT FRANKFORT.
From the painting by Kaulbach.



MAXIMILIANE LA ROCHE BRENTANO.

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

the less refused to marry without her father's consent. To divert her mind she was sent to visit her grandparents at Biberach, the home of Wieland, afterwards so celebrated as a poet. Hearts being easily caught on the rebound Sophie's soon found itself in the possession of this pastor's son, but, a marriage being then impossible with him (he was only seventeen and penniless) her father thrust her unfeelingly into the waiting arms of Hofrath de La Roche, who was not only willing but glad to undertake the task of reconciling her to life. An outlet for her unhappy love experiences was found in writing, and at the time Goethe made her acquaintance she was one of the leaders of the sentimental school then prevailing. In private life also she was a sentimentalist. In 1786 when she made a journey to England and was taken to see Miss Burney, then wearing herself out in the service of Queen Charlotte, the two had a joyfully morbid hour together, a striking account of which is given by Miss Burney in her *Diary*. Though it has nothing to do with Goethe the passage is worth quoting here because it is really rather in tone with "Werther" and his "Sorrows."

"She is now *bien passée* yet has a voice of touching sweetness, eyes of dovelike gentleness, looks supplicating for favour, and an air and demeanour

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

the most tenderly caressing. I can suppose she has thought herself, all her life, the model of the favourite heroine of her own favourite romance, and I can readily believe that she had attractions in her youth nothing short of fascinating." Madame la Fête announced that her friend had had the most extraordinary life and adventures that had fallen to anybody's lot. Madame La Roche replied that they were, in their early part, so connected with M. Wieland, the famous author, that they would not be intelligible without his story. "Eh bien! Ma très-chère, contez-nous donc un peu de ses aventures; ma chère Miss Burney, c'étoit son amant et l'homme le plus extraordinaire — d'un génie! d'un feu! Eh bien, ma chère? où l'avez-vous rencontré? où est-ce qu'il a commencé à vous aimer? contez-nous un peu de tout ça."

"Madame La Roche, looking down upon her fan, then began the recital. She related their first interview, the gradations of their mutual attachment, his extraordinary talents, his literary fame and name; the breach of their union from motives of prudence in their friends; his change of character from piety to voluptuousness, in consoling himself for her loss with an actress; his various adventures, and various transformations from good to bad, in life and conduct; her own marriage with

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

M. La Roche, their subsequent meeting, when she was mother of three children, and all attendant circumstances."

A lady thus lavish of her tenderest emotions in conversation and in books we should not expect to find a very devoted mother. Nor was she. In a later chapter we shall hear something of the way in which she married off her second daughter, but here it is with the marriage of Maxe, as she was called by her intimate friends, that we are concerned. And for first-hand information on that score let us turn to a letter written to his wife by Merck, who introduced Goethe to the family: "It was a sad event to me to go to visit our friend amid barrels of herrings and cheeses. It seems that Mama La Roche allowed herself to be persuaded by M. Dumeiz, who considered nothing but the fortune, and the particular advantage for himself to have an agreeable house to visit. Thou shouldst have seen her making head against the idle talk and jocularities of these merchants: enduring their magnificent dinners, and trying to amuse their Dulnesses. There have been terrible scenes and I do not know but she may be overwhelmed under the burden of her regrets. Goethe is already the friend of the family; he plays with the children, and accompanies Madame's harpsichord with the bass-viol. M. Bren-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

tano, although rather jealous for an Italian, is fond of him and wishes positively that he should frequent the house."

Only a few weeks after the wedding, however, there came a violent end to this pleasant relation. Herr Brentano was no Kestner, and because of the interpretation which he chose to put upon the friendship of Goethe for his wife there ensued certain "terrible moments" as a result of which the young poet flung himself out of the house firmly determined never to enter it again.

Now he was just in the mood to finish *Werther* and shutting himself off from diversions of every kind he completed the manuscript in four weeks. The following autumn it was in print, and before publication its author sent Kestner and his wife a copy, assuming naively that they would have as much pleasure in reading it as he had had in writing it. Such was, however, not the case. Accordingly we find Goethe writing (October, 1774) in reply to a rebuke from Charlotte's husband: "I must write to you at once, my dear ones, — my angry ones, that it may come from the heart. It is done, it is published; forgive me if you can. Let me hear nothing, I pray you, let me hear nothing from you till the issue shall have proved that your apprehensions were overstrained, until even by means of

CHARLOTTE, WHO CUT BREAD AND BUTTER

the book itself you shall have felt more clearly in your hearts how innocent is its mixture of truth and falsehood. . . . I am silent, only I must hold out to you this glad presentiment — it pleases me to fancy and hope that eternal fate has allowed me to do this in order to bind us more firmly to one another. . . .”

Such, of course, has come to be the case. For *Werther* is as alive to-day as ever it was; and we and thousands of others are interested in the Kestners because of it. Happily, it made no real difference then, either, in the friendship of these three. Kestner and Goethe continued in affectionate correspondence until the death of the former in 1800, and sixteen years later, Charlotte and Goethe encountered each other very gladly at Weimar, where the widow was visiting her sister. Goethe, too, was just then sorrowing deeply over the loss of his devoted wife, and it soothed him a good deal to have a quiet heart-to-heart talk with this sweet woman dressed in white who, though her head shook continually, still retained many of the charms which, a quarter of a century before, had inspired the most poignant novel in all literature.

CHAPTER VII

LILI

"LILI was the first, and I can also add she is the last, I truly loved," Goethe one day declared to Eckermann; "for all the inclinations which have since agitated my heart were superficial and trivial in comparison." Of course, this was said in Goethe's old age and cannot be taken too literally. Yet it is none the less distinctly interesting to hear the poet discussing at eighty, the love which had agitated him when twenty-five. "I have never been so near a happiness after my own heart, as during the time of this love for Lili," he asserts. "My affection for her had about it something so delicate, and something so peculiar, that even now, in the representation of that painfully happy epoch, it has an influence upon my style. When, at some future time, you read the fourth volume of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* you will find that *this* love is something very different from the love in novels."

Let us turn to the Lili episode in the Autobiography: "One evening a friend entreated me to go

LILI

with him to a little concert to be given in the house of an eminent merchant of the reformed persuasion. It was already late; but as I loved to do everything on the spur of the moment, I went with him decently dressed as usual. We entered a chamber on the ground floor, — the ordinary but spacious sitting room of the family. The company was numerous. A piano stood in the middle at which the only daughter of the house sat down immediately, and played with considerable facility and grace. I stood at the lower end of the piano, that I might be near enough to observe her form and bearing; there was something childlike in her manner and the movements she was obliged to make in playing were unconstrained and easy.

“After the sonata was finished, she stepped towards the end of the piano to meet me; we merely saluted, however, without further conversation, for a quartet had already commenced. At the close of it I moved somewhat nearer and uttered some civil compliment, telling her what pleasure it gave me that my first acquaintance with her should also have made me acquainted with her talent. She managed to make a very clever reply and kept her position as I did mine. I saw that she was observing me very closely but I took it all in good part since I, in my turn, had something graceful to look at. Meanwhile

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

as we gazed at one another I was conscious of feeling an attractive power of the gentlest kind. The moving about of the company and her performance prevented any further approach that evening. But I must confess that I was anything but displeased when, on taking leave, the mother gave me to understand that they hoped soon to see me again, while the daughter seemed to join in the request with some friendliness of manner. I did not fail, therefore, to repeat my visits at suitable intervals."

The first meeting with Lili (Anna Elizabeth Schönmann), here so simply and vividly described, probably occurred on New Year's Day 1775. The house visited was that of Frau Schönmann, née D'Orville, who, though she had been a widow for twelve years, still carried on, as a silent partner, the large banking business on the Korn market which was the chief source of the family wealth. Lili was at this time nearly seventeen, the only girl in a family with four sons. To win her could not but be an excellent thing for Goethe from the worldly standpoint. But it was not with this in mind that he soon contracted the habit of visiting her and her mother often. A strong liking for the girl had taken possession of his heart and she, in return, gave evidence of feeling deeply the magic charm of her new admirer's personality.

LILI

Already Lili had had many suitors but none had touched her heart. Now, however, before she knew it she was actually in love. The Autobiography tells us how this happened: "On the strength of my writings people gave me credit for knowledge of the human heart, as it was then called, and in this view Lili's conversations and mine were morally interesting in every way. But how could we talk of such inward matters without coming to mutual disclosures? It was not long before in a quiet hour Lili told me the history of her youth. . . . Little weaknesses, too, were thought of and among them she could not deny that she had often remarked in herself a certain gift of attracting others, with which, at the same time, was united a peculiar faculty of letting them go again. By prattling on thus we came at last to the important point, — that she had exercised this gift on me, too, but had been punished for it in that she herself had been attracted in turn by me. These confessions flowed forth from so pure and childlike a nature, that by them she made me entirely her own."

Yet powerful as was the attraction Goethe felt for this charming girl, he could not patiently put up with the social surroundings which were as the breath of life to her. He had been accustomed to move among scholars, clergymen and officials who cared about the things dear to him and who respected

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

what he had been able to accomplish. For the rest, there were such households as the Buffs and the Schönkopfs, where he was liked for what he was and not for the laced coats he wore or the attitudes he assumed. How different the Schöнемann home! Though the people there might do him honour as a literary lion ¹ and even lay snares to capture him as a guest for their receptions and dances, they were not in the least able to understand his poetic aspirations or to sympathize with his warm, deep humanity. Lili, to be sure, gave him sincere steadfast love. But when he wanted her to himself for a quiet hour she must always dress to go out somewhere insisting that he, too, should make himself ready to look in, ere the evening was over, at one or another of the fashionable homes which had been opened to him through her. Though he could not choose but follow her in the dance she thus led him he chafed visibly, as we see from the lines:

“ She with magic thread has bound me
That defies my strength or skill,
She has drawn a circle round me,
Holds me fast against my will.
Cruel maid, her charms enslave me,
I must live as she would have me.
Ah, how great the change to me
Love, when wilt thou set me free? ”

¹ Cf. *Goethe's Frauengestalten* von Adolf Stahr, Vol. I, p. 220.

LILI

"Not yet," love made answer. Instead of being set free he was indeed, to be more closely bound than he ever had been before. For there now came to Frankfort for the Easter fair a certain Mademoiselle Delf of Heidelberg, an energetic business woman, who for years had been a friend of the Schöнемanns' and had known and loved Lili from her babyhood. It is quite amusing to see the way in which this brisk old maid took the situation in hand and forced upon Goethe the betrothal which he, in all his previous love-affairs, had successfully avoided. Without saying a word to the parties chiefly concerned she interviewed Goethe's parents (to whom he had introduced her though not with this in mind), wrung from them some kind of consent and then, having talked the thing over with Frau Schöнемann also, walked straight into the room one evening and said peremptorily to the unsuspecting lovers: "Join hands."

"I stood opposite to Lili and offered her my hand," the poet relates in the Autobiography, "and she, not hesitatingly, but still slowly, placed her hands in mine. After a long breath we fell with great emotion into each other's arms. . . . If my loved one had before seemed to me beautiful, graceful, attractive, she now appeared a worthy and superior being. She was, so to speak, a double person; her grace and

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

loveliness were now mine, that I felt as before; but her dignity of character, her self-reliance, her trustworthiness in every way remained her own. I beheld this, I understood it and rejoiced in it as in a capital the interest of which I should share with her as long as I lived."

But, if Mademoiselle Delf had known Goethe better, she, being a clever little woman, would have perceived that it must only goad this young man into slipping a bond that already chafed somewhat to show him, several times a day, that he was really bound fast. Only a few weeks before his betrothal he had exclaimed in *Stella* (under the guise of Fernando) "I should be a fool to allow myself to be fettered. This condition stifles all my powers, robs my soul of all its courage, shuts me in, *I must get out into the free world.*"

It was not so much that he really resented the paces through which Lili put him (he tells us that he was always proud of her when he saw her in society); nor was it either because it had been found impossible to establish truly friendly relations between his own household and Lili's that he longed to be again free. But he was not ready to take a wife. All the while that he was making desperate efforts to be the man Lili would have him, he was declaring in letters to the Countess

LILI

Augusta von Stolberg that he must break loose from this tie which bound him.

Augusta von Stolberg, the sister of the two Counts Stolberg, with whom Goethe is soon to become intimate, had been swept off her feet by reading *Werther* and had written to its author an enthusiastic letter in praise of the book. To which he replied, just after Lili had made on his heart the great impression we have already noted:

“ (To the dear Nameless One)

“ MY DEAR —: — I will give you no name, for what are the names, Friend, Sister, Beloved, Bride, Wife, or a word which comprises a complex of all these names beside the direct feeling — to the — I cannot write further, your letter has caught me at a wonderful time. Adieu, though at the first moment.

“ Yet I return — I feel that you can endure it, — this disjointed stammering expression, when the image of the Eternal stirs in us. And what is that but Love? . . . Write to me and I will think of you in my best hours. . . . Once more adieu.”

Evidently she did write, and quite promptly, for, less than a month later, “ the dear nameless one ” received another letter which reflects very vividly Goethe’s discomfort in trying to be fashionable for

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Lili's sake: "If you can picture to yourself, my dear, a Goethe in a laced coat, otherwise from head to foot in tolerably consistent finery, illuminated by the unmeaning splendour of sconces and chandeliers, amidst all kinds of people, kept at the card-table by a pair of beautiful eyes, and in varying dissipation, driven from company to concert and from thence to a ball, and, with all the interest of frivolity paying court to a pretty Blondine, you have the present Carnival-Goethe, who lately stammered forth to you a few gloomy feelings, who cannot write to you, who sometimes forgets you, because in your presence he feels himself quite unbearable.

"But now there is another, in gray beaver coat, with brown silk necktie and boots, who already detects the spring in the freshening February air, to whom his dear wide world will now soon reopen, who ever living, striving and working in himself, seeks to express according to his power, sometimes the innocent feelings of youth in little poems, sometimes the strong spices of life in various dramas, or again the forms of his friends and his neighbourhood and his beloved household goods with chalk upon gray paper; asking neither on the right nor left, what of all that he does will last. Because working he ever ascends a step higher, because he will leap at no ideal, but fighting and playing will leave his

LILI

feelings to develop themselves to activity. He it is from whose mind you are never absent, who suddenly in early morning feels a summons to write to you.

"Moreover, if it were disclosed to me who and where you are, it would make no difference; when I think of you I feel nothing but equality, love, nearness. And so remain to me — as I surely remain through all whirl and hurly-burly, — unalterable. 'Tis well, indeed! — one hand-kiss — Farewell. Goethe."

None of Goethe's friendships with women is so entirely a thing of mere sentiment as that with Augusta von Stolberg — for he never saw her. She had asked him in her first letter, however, if he was happy, and this call to self-consciousness was, of course, immensely conducive to morbid introspection in a youth who found writing easy. Because he felt under the constant necessity of showing her either that he was happy or wasn't happy we have such a letter as this of March 6, 1775: "Why should I not write to you? why lay down the pen again for which I have so often reached my hand? How constantly I have been thinking of you. And now! . . . The twenty-eighth of February we danced out the close of the carnival. I was there among the first in the room, walked up and

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

down and thought of you and then much joy and love surrounded me. The next morning, as I came home, I was going to write to you, but I left it and talked much with you. What shall I tell you, since I cannot quite tell you my present position as you do not know me? Love! Remain kind to me. I wish I could rest on your hand, repose in your eyes. Great God! What is the heart of man? Good night. I thought I should get better while writing. In vain, my head is overstrained. Adieu. To-day is the sixth of March, I think. You too must always write the date; at such a distance it is a great pleasure.

" Good morning, dear. The carpenters who are erecting a building over there, have awakened me, and I have no rest in bed. I will write to my sister and then another word to you.

" It is night; I was going into the garden again but was obliged to remain standing under the doorway; it is raining hard. Much have I thought of you! Thought that I had not yet thanked you for your silhouette. . . . This pure intellectual forehead, this sweet firmness of the nose, these dear lips, this well-defined chin, the nobility of the whole! Thank you, my love, thank you. To-day has been a wonderful day; I have drawn, written a scene. If I did not write drama now I should die! Soon I will

LILI

send you one written. Would that I could sit opposite to you and work it out in your heart! . . ."

The drama to which he is here alluding is *Stella* and the germ of it was undoubtedly Swift's relations to Stella and to Vanessa, a situation into which Goethe felt abundantly able to project himself by reason of the fact that, though he now deeply loves Lili, he thinks that he still loves Frederika also. The prototypes of the three chief personages in his play are clearly: for Fernando, Goethe; for Stella, Lili; for Cäcilie, Frederika. Goethe, with the frankness which characterized his storm and stress period, made no effort to conceal this. But Stella is much more like Lili than Cäcilie is like Frederika. It is probable, indeed, that Johanna Fahlmer, whom Goethe calls "Tante" (because, though only a few years his senior, she was the aunt of his friends, the Jacobis), coloured the character of Fernando's wife, whom it is necessary to make an older woman. Goethe had not met Fräulein Fahlmer until after the Wetzlar episode, but one would think her an aunt of long standing from some of the letters he writes to her about this time. One of these, dated Offenbach, March, 1775, shows that he is the guest of the Schönemanns at the beautiful estate of Lili's uncle Bernard. This was one of the places to which Lili "drew him against his will."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

"There is much wonderful and new in me, dear Aunt," he confides, after telling her he knew she would like *Stella*, one act of which she has already seen. "In three hours I hope to see Lili. On Sunday, too!!! Take the girl to your heart, it will be good for you both." In a later letter to this same sympathetic soul he says of Lili that on a certain occasion "she was as beautiful as an angel — and how better than beautiful."

None the less, he has made up his mind to wrench himself free of this attachment, which will grow into marriage in spite of him, unless he takes himself violently off. So when, in the middle of May, the two Counts Christian and Friedrich Stolberg came to visit him at Frankfort on their way to Switzerland, he made the desperate resolve to go away with them — perhaps to Italy, a country which his father had always meant he should visit before settling down to the business of life. To some of his friends he said that he was going to visit his sister and it was at this time that he made the significant admission to Herder, "I play ball against the wall and shuttlecock with the women. I thought a short time ago I was coming nearer the haven of domestic happiness and firm footing in the genuine joy and sorrow of the earth, but am in miserable fashion flung out again on the wide sea. Thus I



GOETHE AND LILL.



KARL AUGUST.

After a pastel in the possession of the Grand
Duke of Weimar.



CORONA SCHRÖTER.

From a portrait painted by herself about
1782. See p. 329.

LILI

dance my life away upon the thread called *fatum congenitum*. . . .”

To Lili he did not even say good-bye upon leaving home with his two young counts. The aloofness of her relatives just of late had caused Goethe to hold back from her society somewhat; and, very likely, she quite understood that the journey was really an experiment to see whether her lover could do without her. That he did not, however, succeed, in spite of all his efforts, in blotting her image from his mind we see from the letters to Johanna Fahlmer. In the middle of May he writes her from Mannheim to tell him, when she talks to him of the theatre, whether Lili was there; and, a week later, from Strassburg, he admits that though he has been sleeping, eating, drinking, bathing, riding and driving in the open air the chief aim of his journey has failed thus far, and the chances are that it will be worse than ever with the Bear of Lili's menagerie when he returns.

And then, two days later, the thing happened which changed the whole course of his life and helped him, as nothing else could, to thrust poor Lili out of his thoughts and to live for himself and his art. For at Karlsruhe he met Karl August, the young Duke of Weimar, and there sprang up between them a love and a confidence which endured so long as they two drew breath. One other very eventful

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

thing also befell Goethe during this journey. At Strassburg he made the acquaintance of the famous physician, Zimmermann, from Hanover, who showed him ten silhouettes, among them that of Frau von Stein. Goethe had met this lady's husband, who was in the retinue of the Duke, but this did not prevent him from poring over her shadow-picture until, if we may trust his own words, it caused him to lose three nights of sleep. Then he wrote under her portrait: "It would be a glorious spectacle to see how the world mirrors itself in this soul. She sees the world as it is and yet she sees it through the medium of love, — while the general impression she makes is one of gentleness." Still another effective move against poor Lili was made by Goethe's sister Cornelia, who, when he visited her at Emmendingen, could talk of little else than of how unhappy he would be if he married this sweet and lovely girl. She herself was most unhappy in marriage and she assumed that Wolfgang would be the same. Yet the fact of the matter seems to be that none of the women with whom Goethe at one time or another fell in love was really so suited to him as was Lili. He was telling just the stern sad truth when he wrote in the Autobiography that they were "two lovers kept apart by cold calculations of reason."

No sooner was he back than he knew that his

LILI

longing for the girl had been increased rather than diminished by his period of self-imposed separation from her. He could not now stay in Frankfort when she was in Offenbach and so we find him writing from her own desk at the latter place, to the Countess Augusta:

“ One word that my heart may be free, only one hand-clasp. I can say nothing to you. Here! How shall I name her to you! Before this pretty straw writing-case only delicate little notes should be penned; and yet these tears and this oppression! What discord. Oh that I could tell you all! Here in the room of the girl who makes me unhappy by no fault of hers, with the soul of an angel, whose bright days I trouble — I! . . . Fritz is better off than I [Fritz had just been jilted!]. In vain for three months have I wandered about in the open air, absorbing a thousand new objects with all my senses. And now I am sitting again in Offenbach, become as simple as a child, as confined as a parrot on the perch. . . . At night, on the terrace by the Main, I look across and think of you! So far! And then you and Fritz and I and everything entangles itself in a snaky knot and I find no atmosphere for writing. . . . And here on the table, a pocket-handkerchief, a necktie, and yonder the dear girl's boots.

“ N. B. To-day we are going to ride. . . . I hear

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

her voice. I may stay. She will get ready in the next room. . . . I have described to you how it all looks around me in order to drive away the spirits by the sense of sight. Lili was surprised to find me here; they had missed me. She asked to whom I was writing. I told her. Adieu, Gustchen. . . . Write to me. THE RESTLESS ONE.

“For God’s sake let no one see my letters!”
(August 3, 1775.)

The next day, to Lavater, he confides that he has recently been pious again, — and declares that Lili looked like an angel in her riding habit. He adds that he is over-strained and we have no difficulty, as we read the letter, in believing this to be the truth. A few days later he sends the physiognomist a *resumé* of the qualities he thinks he has discovered (from her silhouette) in Frau von Stein. They are as follows: “Firmness; amiable and unchanging continuance of the object; self-satisfaction; affectionate amiability; innocence and goodness; self-sustaining conversation; indulgent firmness; good-will; faithfulness; conquers generally with tears.” How accurately he read this lady’s character from her shadow-picture we shall soon have an opportunity to decide.

What of Lili all this while? Was *she* suffering, as a sensitive woman would be very likely to suffer, from the consciousness that her lover wished himself

LILI

free of her and away? To me her position seems to have been nothing short of pitiful. Her relatives had read Goethe like a book and had concluded from his strikingly long absence what was, in point of fact, the case, that he was trying to set himself free. This they told her with embroideries of their own. They further pointed out that the two families had nothing in common and that it was very uncertain anyhow what kind of future lay before this roving poetic genius. There was also covert whispering to the effect that Goethe had betrayed and abandoned a girl named Frederika back in his Strassburg days! Through all this Lili, though she suffered much, bore herself magnificently. She even declared with great determination that, if the objections to the marriage could not be removed at home she was ready to go to America with this man she so deeply loved.

Had these two been free to follow their own inclinations there is little doubt that a marriage ceremony would have been performed between them at Offenbach that September. For when they attended together the wedding of Goethe's friend, Pastor Ewald, the poet experienced an exalted and very beautiful moment at the side of his loved one. To the Countess Augusta he wrote: "I was in the most cruelly, solemnly sweet situation in all my life. Through the glowing tears of love I gazed on the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

world and the moon and everything about me was soulful while in the distance sounded the forest horn and the noisy glee of the wedding guests." Next day he wrote to Johanna Fahlmer, " My heart is just like a stocking, the outside in, innerside out. Pray, pray, look about you at the Fair for something for Lili! ! ! ! Finery, jewelry, the most fashionable, the most elegant. You only understand it and my love as well. But this is sacred between us. Mama must know nothing of it. . . . And write what it costs! ! ! "

This last sentence tells us much. Goethe, though betrothed to a rich girl, had no money with which to buy her easily even the trinkets he feels to be her due, much less to marry her and provide a fitting establishment. His father did not in the least approve of Lili, considering her a mere society woman; so, by no stretch of the imagination, could Goethe see himself installing this delicately reared daughter of fortune in an apartment fitted up in a part of his ancestral home, as he had talked to Katherine Schönkopf of doing with his wife. The incongruity of this course was forced on him afresh, just at this time, by the coming to the Schöнемann home of a large number of guests brought to the city by the Michaelmas fair. Again Lili had to play the rôle of daughter of the house, and again Goethe was

LILI

obliged to hover gracefully in the background. It was probably now that he wrote *Lili's Menagerie*,¹ in which he figures as the Bear among all the animals which surround his loved one in the social circus of which she was queen.

How deep and real Goethe's distress of mind was at this time is shown in a long rambling journal-letter to the Countess Augusta covering his mental and physical peregrinations during the five days from September fourteen to September nineteen. Sometimes he is talking, in this letter, of his passionate love for Lili, sometimes of the costume which he is to wear to a masked ball at Offenbach. Once he confides that he and his beloved have not been on particularly good terms for a week past, and the next day, he tells of jumping out of bed with a light heart and the sudden consciousness "that I was saved, that something would yet be made of me." Let us, however, follow the remainder of this remarkable letter as he himself wrote it.

"Half past three in the afternoon. The morning was open and fine, and I did something to give Lili

¹ "There's no menagerie, I trow,
So varied as my Lili's now.
And what has this enchantress done?
A great wild bear unlicked and rude
She lured from out his native wood
And made him live in unity
With other beasts that tamer be."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

a little pleasure. Saw visitors, wandered about after dinner playing the fool among friends and strangers. I am now going to Offenbach, in order not to see Lili at the play this evening nor at the concert to-morrow. I put up the sheet and will go on writing from there.

“ Offenbach. Seven in the evening. Amid a set of people who are very fond of me, often sympathize with me! It is so now! I am again sitting at the little writing table from which I wrote to you before. . . . Adieu for to-day. It is night and the Main still twinkles between the dark banks.

“ Offenbach. Sunday 17th, 10 o'clock at night. The day has gone by indifferent and dull. When I got up I felt well, wrote a scene of my *Faust*, passed a few hours idly, made love a little to a girl of whom your brothers could tell you; she is a singular creature. Dined in company with a dozen good young fellows who are just what God made them. Rowed by myself up and down on the water; I have a whim to learn to row myself. Played an hour or two at faro and dreamed away another hour with good people. And, now I sit down to say good night to you. Through all this I was like a rat who has eaten poison; it runs into every hole, gulps down everything moist, swallows everything eatable that comes in its way, whilst its inside burns with extinguishable destroying fire. A week ago to-day Lili

LILI

was here. And at that time I was in the fearfulest, gayest, sweetest state in all my life (I might say). Oh, Gustchen, why can I not tell anything about it? Why? . . .

"May 18th. My little boat is ready and I am going at once to steer it below. A splendid morning, the mist has dispersed, everything fine and bright around. And I am going back into town. To the sieve of the Danaïdes¹ again. Adieu."

"A fine bright morning. Oh Gustchen, will my heart at last feel some day in thrilling true delight and sorrow the blessedness which has been granted to men and not be driven about for ever, between Heaven and Hell on the waves of imagination and overstrained sensibility? Best one, I beg you to write me also a diary like this. That is the only thing which overcomes the perpetual distance.

"Monday night, half past 11. Frankfort, at my table. I come once more to say good night to you. I have hurried and raved until now. To-morrow it will be still worse. Oh, dearest, what is the life of man! And yet again, the manifold good which gathers round me, the manifold love which surrounds me. . . . I saw Lili to-day after dinner, saw her at the play. I had not a word to say to her and said

¹ According to the Greek poets the Danaïdes were punished in Hades by being endlessly condemned to pour water through a sieve.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

nothing. *Would I were free of it.* Oh, Gustchen, and yet I tremble for the moment when she could be indifferent to me and I become hopeless. But I remain true to my heart, and let things take their course. As they will." On the following day he again sees Lili at the theatre but this time he speaks to her only "seven words." Düntzer asserts that in these seven words he told his fiancée that, since she was so much under her mother's influence that she can never belong entirely to him, he will leave her now once and for all. Whether he actually expressed all this or not we shall probably never know. But it is a fact that that was the end. On September 24 he writes "Tante" Fahlmer that he "has endured on all sides terribly this week, but also resisted." He adds that he will tell her all about it presently, and very likely he did. Reticence concerning his love affairs was never one of Goethe's faults.

Fate, however, which seems often to have played into Goethe's hands, made matters very easy for him on this occasion, also. Karl August and his young wife passed through Frankfort on October 12 on their way back to Weimar, and the Duke was very urgent in his wish that Goethe should come to Court. It was, therefore, arranged that the poet should hold himself in readiness to set out from home

LILI

in a few days, — when Chamberlain von Kalb would call for him with a new carriage. The chagrin of Goethe when a week had passed and that carriage had failed to appear may be more easily imagined than described. He had said adieu to all his friends and naturally did not care to show himself again in Frankfort, but one evening, when he could stand confinement to the house no longer, he wrapped himself up in a cloak and wandered about in the streets. Without noticing it he found himself in front of Lili's house. The curtains were down at the windows but he heard her at the piano and the song which she sang was his own: "Wherefore drawest thou me against my will?"

"I could not help thinking," he tells us in the Autobiography, "that she gave it with more expression than ever; I could hear it plainly word for word, for I had pressed my ear as close as the convex grating [the room was on the ground floor] would allow. After she had sung it through I saw by the shadow which fell upon the curtain that she got up and walked backwards and forwards; but I tried in vain to catch the outline of her graceful figure through the thick curtains. Nothing but the firm resolution to tear myself away, to really renounce her, and not to burden her with my presence could have determined me to leave so dear a spot." The

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

consideration that his reappearance — after he was supposed to have left the town — would cause comment, also weighed with him, as he admits. In this instance, as in many another, the youth's sound common sense balanced his amorous inclinations.

A few more days passed, the end of the month arrived and still there came no news of Herr von Kalb or of the new carriage. The poet's father, who hated the aristocrats, was full of glee and quoted an ancient proverb to the effect that when common folk eat cherries with the Great they must expect to have the stones flung in their faces. He was, however, generous enough to say that, inasmuch as his son had his trunk all packed and was supposed to have left the town, he would better make the best of an awkward situation by taking his long-deferred trip to Italy. After some hesitation, Goethe accepted his father's proposal and, early on the morning of October 30, 1775, he set off in the direction of the south. "On the Korn Markt" (where Lili resided), we read in his diary, "the plumber's boy was noisily straightening up his shop and greeted the neighbour's maid out in the early morning rain; this greeting was in a manner prophetic of the coming day. Ah, thought I, if only — No, I said, there once was a time when I — Whoever has such memories should

LILI

envy nobody. Lili, adieu, Lili, for the second time, adieu! ”

How Goethe got to Weimar after all instead of going to Italy is delightfully told in the final pages of the Autobiography. For his objective point, as he left Frankfort, was Heidelberg and this for several reasons. One was that he had heard that his missing Weimar friend must pass through Heidelberg from Karlsruhe; so when the post-house was reached, he left a note there for a cavalier who would arrive in the kind of carriage for which he had been anxiously waiting. Then, Heidelberg was the home of Mademoiselle Delf and he wanted to ease his aching heart by talking to her about Lili.

He was cordially received by the brisk Mademoiselle and, though she did not care to talk to him about the maiden he had left behind, she was more than willing to lend a hand to a match between him and another girl of her acquaintance who appealed to Goethe a good deal because she “resembled Frederika.” With great emphasis and at appalling length Mademoiselle Delf explained to him that, if he would unite himself to this attractive girl, there was a very good chance of his gaining entrance into the service of the Palatinate. Not that she would interfere with his journey to Italy. On the contrary, she urged that most strenuously. For, in Italy he could

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

mature his views of art, while the "girl who looked like Frederika" matured her inclination for him.

"One night," explains the narrative, "Mademoiselle Delf had gone on until late unfolding to me her plans, and all that certain parties were disposed to do for me. . . . It was about one o'clock when we separated. I soon fell into a sound sleep, but before very long I was awakened by the horn of a postilion who was stopping and blowing it before the house. Very soon Mademoiselle Delf appeared with a light and a letter in her hands, and coming up to my bedside, she exclaimed, 'Here's the letter; read and tell me what it says. Surely it comes from the Weimar people. If it is an invitation do not follow it but call to mind our conversation.'

"I asked her to give me a light and leave me for a quarter of an hour to myself. She went away very reluctantly. I remained thinking for some time without opening the letter. . . . Then I read and found that all which had happened was explained naturally enough. My missing guide had waited for the new landau, which was to come from Strassburg, day after day, hour after hour, just as we had waited for him; then for the sake of some business he had gone round by way of Mannheim to Frankfort and to his dismay had not found me there. He sent a hasty letter by express, proposing that, now the

LILI

mistake was explained, I should instantly return and save him the shame of going to Weimar without me."

As the poet read these words he almost at once decided, strongly as he felt the attraction of Italy, to put that lure aside and turn his face in the direction of Karl August's court. When Mademoiselle Delf entered he told her in a word or two the decision to which he had come.

As he expected she began at once to try to dissuade him, and they had an excited scene, which he cut short by ordering his servant to engage a post-coach. Mademoiselle Delf was still urging her point when the coach, in due time, came and he could think of no better way of stemming her torrent of protest than by grandiloquently exclaiming in the passionate words of Egmont: "Child, child, no more. As if lashed by invisible spirits the fiery steeds of time are running away with the light chariot of our fate and there is nothing left for us but to muster our courage, hold fast the reins, and guide the wheels now to the right, now to the left, away from a rock here, away from the edge of an abyss there. Whither is it going? Who knows? Scarcely can we remember whence it came!"

Bewildered, indeed, must Lili's old friend have been as her handsome young guest, after deliver-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ing himself of this enigmatic utterance, dashed into his waiting conveyance and bade the driver whip up the horses. I should think she must have resolved never again to meddle with the love affairs of a poet. Lili herself, certainly, made some such resolution. For, a year and a half after Goethe's departure from Frankfort, she married a rich young Strassburg banker, Bernhard Friedrich von Türckheim, in whose steadfast and tender affection she realized deep happiness. Goethe went to call on her in the course of that Alpine tour of 1779, in which Frederika was also visited, and found her playing with her little seven weeks old daughter. He left her, impressed afresh with her sweetness and womanly charm.

Bielschowsky¹ has advanced the interesting theory that Dorothea in the poem, *Hermann und Dorothea*, is none other than Lili and there seems considerable warrant for so thinking. For Lili's husband, after being elected mayor of Strassburg, was deposed from office and banished from the city because his conservative and aristocratic attitude gave offence to the Paris of the revolution. For a time he took refuge in a small estate which he owned in Lorraine, but he was routed out of that home, also, — in July, 1794, — by the terrorists, who seemed deter-

¹ *Life of Goethe*, by Albert Bielschowsky, Ph.D.

LILI

mined to have his life. Having received in time, however, word that a warrant had been issued for his arrest, Herr von Türckheim fled for the German boundary and, when he was in a place of safety, sent for his wife to follow him, suggesting that, in order to avoid suspicion, she disguise herself as a peasant. Whereupon the plucky Lili set forth to make the journey on foot accompanied by her five children, the youngest of whom she bore on her back! Of course her beauty drew upon her insolent attentions which it required all her moral dignity to withstand, but she made successfully, none the less, the journey upon which she had set out, and arrived safely in Heidelberg, where her old friend, Mademoiselle Delf, welcomed her warmly and helped her to rejoin her husband. Then the whole family moved to Erlangen, where they remained a year.

During this time Lili made the acquaintance of Countess Henriette von Egloffstein, who was in close touch with Weimar, and to her new friend she confided that she would be glad to have Goethe know that she remembered him with gratitude and regarded him as the author of her spiritual life. To Bäbe Schulthess, whom she met in Zurich, in September, 1795, she gave a similar message, and when these two tributes reached Goethe, about the same time, reinforced by enthusiastic descriptions of how

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

wonderful a woman Lili had grown to be, the poet was deeply moved. As he thought of this love of his youth, he remembered how he himself had looked and felt, when he lived at home with his parents, and to the Hermann into whose character it pleased him to read some of his own traits he gave for a wife Lili as she had *looked* before her marriage and *felt* during the painful experiences of the revolution. The result is one of the most exquisite poems in all literature.

A dozen years after the poem had been written, Goethe broke his long silence to Lili and in answer to a letter of hers wrote: "I kiss your letter a thousand times in memory of those days which I count among the happiest of my life." This note was signed "ever your grateful Goethe." It is worth adding that in his old age Goethe said that *Hermann und Dorothea* was almost the only one of his longer poems which he still enjoyed, and that he could never read it without being deeply affected.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

SCHILLER, writing to his friend, Körner, some years after Goethe's arrival in Weimar, of Charlotte von Stein, with whom his brother-poet had long — as he knew — been in love, concluded an enthusiastic description of the lady's gifts of mind and soul with this sentence, "They say the connection is perfectly pure and blameless." And what "they" said then "they" for the most say now. That is a daring soul and one likely to be assailed as an "evil-minded slanderer of a noble woman long dead" who ventures the opinion, especially in Germany, that Goethe's relation to the Frau von Stein was anything less, or more, than the noblest example in all history of a purely Platonic friendship. Adolph Stahr and Robert Keil, to be sure, have expressed themselves in print as of quite different belief, but Heinrich Düntzer, the indefatigable Goethe authority, who has written innumerable painstaking volumes on various phases of the poet's life and work, refutes their assertions in page upon page of obviously

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

careful research and, as they have nothing to support their views but their own "wicked" interpretations of Goethe's letters and diary, leaves scarcely a shred of their thesis standing. For Düntzer sees only the "poetic expression of fervent admiration" in material they have held to be quite damning proof that Charlotte was false to her wifely duty.

These letters,¹ more than a thousand of them, are extant and may be read to-day by whomsoever will. Individual interpretations of them will be very largely governed by two things: the kind of person the reader is, and the degree of intimacy he or she possesses with the life and character of Goethe. For, had such letters been written by any one else, to a married lady, throughout a period of more than ten years, it would be fairly easy to determine the kind of relation of which they must have been the outgrowth and expression. Goethe, however, was often fervid when he wrote to his woman friends. But, on the other hand, just because he was a passionate man, he had always before found it either desirable or necessary to flee when his love for a

¹ They are Goethe's side of the correspondence only, for Frau von Stein had the good sense to demand her letters back and to burn them. As one reads them one likes to recall Goethe's own saying that a man's letters are his most valuable memorial.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

much-admired lady had reached a certain stage of intensity. From the Frau von Stein he did not flee. All of which is by way of confessing that I have had considerable difficulty in making up my mind in regard to Goethe and the Frau von Stein. My predilection, before I had gone much into the matter, was toward a Platonic interpretation of their remarkable friendship; then, as I came to know Goethe better, it seemed to me that the relation *must*, now and then at least, have lapsed from Platonism; but my recent period of residence in Weimar, close to the relics and the records of their lives has caused me to revert quite definitely to my first opinion. Though Goethe did not change his nature when he came to know Charlotte von Stein, he was so immensely stimulated through her to be and to do his best, that, for a time at any rate, he was a new creature.

It was early in November, 1775 that our poet arrived in Weimar and began to mingle with its society. Five months later he wrote the following verses:

“Kannst jeden Zug in meinem Wesen,
Spähst, wie die reinste Nerve klingt,
Konntest mich mit einem Blicke lesen,
Den so schwer ein sterblich Aug' durchdringt.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

**"Tropftest Mässigung dem heissen Blute,
Richtetest den wilden, irren Lauf,
Und in deinen Engelsarmen ruhte
Die zerstörte Brust sich wieder auf." ¹**

One does not need to fit these lines too closely to Goethe's biography at just this stage of his Weimar stay in order to understand their meaning: that now, for the first time, our poet has found a woman who, if she were free, could satisfy every need of his many-sided nature.

Unlike the women whom Goethe had previously found attractive, Charlotte von Stein had already lived long and suffered much. Born on Christmas Day, 1742, of a father — John Christian William von Schardt, marshal of the ducal household of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach — who like Goethe's own father was a rather stiff and repellent person, she was fortunate, as was Goethe himself, in the possession of a mother endowed with both sense and sensibility. Frau von Schardt was thirteen years

¹ "Every impulse of my breast thou knewest,
Couldst foretell the tingling of each nerve,
So into my inmost heart thou grewest,
Making Love's clear glance Love's purpose serve.

' My hot passions thou didst gently temper,
Didst my erring steps full well control,
And through thy angelic soft caresses,
Rest, at last, stole o'er my troubled soul."

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

younger than her husband and was of North British descent, — one of the Irvings of Drum. It was to her mother, undoubtedly, that Charlotte owed such strength as she exhibited in withstanding the too-passionate advances of the handsome young poet.

For many years before Goethe's arrival in Weimar the woman he now elected to love had been an important figure in the life of the place, for when but fifteen she was appointed lady-in-waiting to the Duchess Amalia, then just delivered of an heir. Anna Amalia was at this time only eighteen herself so the appointment was not so unfitting as it at first sight appears. Moreover, Charlotte, even then, was in many ways quite a mature person; as a mere child she had preferred gazing at the stars to playing with a doll. The fine quality of her mind which Goethe found so attractive was very likely due in large measure to the fact, that, during her most impressionable years, she was the intimate companion of Anna Amalia. This woman, who at nineteen found herself a widow with an infant heir to whom was soon to be added a brother, bore herself in all the phases of life as became one close of kin to the great Frederick of Prussia.

For the most part Anna Amalia was a very shrewd judge of men but if she picked out the Herr von Stein as a fitting husband for her young friend,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Charlotte, she showed herself to be but human in that she *could* make mistakes in reading character. Von Stein was an impressive figure of a man, as became the court master of horse, but when one has added to this that he owned a castle in the neighbourhood and possessed some business talent, one has said all that one honestly can of his qualifications as a husband. The girl was twenty-one and he six years her senior when the marriage took place, — on May 8, 1764, — at the ducal palace at Weimar before the entire retinue of Court functionaries. In the following March Charlotte became a mother and among the fifty sponsors of her first-born son, Karl, were the Duchess Regent Amalia and the nine year old Crown Prince Karl August, who was later to bring Goethe to Weimar.

However grossly Charlotte may be thought by adverse critics to have failed in the duties of wife and mother *after* Goethe came into her life, even the present Kaiser must needs endorse her pursuit of that vocation during the ten years which elapsed between her wedding day and her first acquaintance with the poet. For, during that time, she bore seven children, of whom three, only, Karl, Ernst and Fritz ¹ lived to grow up. The loss of her babies was

¹ How little credence may be placed in tradition is seen from the fact that Goethe, after his death, was credited in Weimar with being the

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

very hard for Charlotte von Stein to bear and she deeply resented, too, as many a woman has done since, the loss of health which was a result of her too-frequent motherhood. Twenty-five years later, referring to this period, she wrote to Schiller's wife: "Wearied with weeping I fell asleep, to drag myself, on waking, through another day; and heavy lay the thought on me, wherefore has nature put this affliction upon one half of the race? Women, on account of it, should be granted many other privileges of life, but even there we have been curtailed; it is not perceived that to discharge the thousand little details of life which we have to attend to more ability (for which we get no credit) is required than for the doing of a genius who is at once accorded honour and fame." A woman who in the eighteenth century could think through and enunciate such a sentiment as that will readily be recognized as one who must strongly appeal to a man of Goethe's type of mind.

It will be remembered that Goethe had fallen in love with the Frau von Stein's silhouette back in the days when he still longed for Lili. He had expected, therefore, that he would be a good deal thrilled upon making the acquaintance of this interesting woman.

father of Fritz von Stein in spite of the fact that the lad was three years old before the poet and his mother met.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The impression she actually did make on him, when, early in November 1775, he was presented to her, at a Court function, by the Duke himself was slight. For the poor lady was drooping and ill and had lost all joy in life. Many months of each year she was accustomed to pass in her husband's castle at Kochburg, about fifteen miles from Weimar, and she had only just returned from that gloomy place and dragged herself rather reluctantly to Court, when this momentous introduction was performed. Yet, though she was not in good health, her soul looked out clearly if pathetically through her great powerful eyes at the handsome author of *Werther*, whom the Duke was determined to honour.

Vivid pictures of Goethe's early Weimar experiences are to be found in his letters to Johanna Fahlmer. A fortnight after his arrival, and about the time he first met Frau von Stein, he wrote: "Dear little Aunt. How like a sleigh-ride goes my life; swiftly away and tinkling and careering up and down. God knows for what I am still destined, that I pass through such a school. This gives my life new impetus and everything will be well. I can say nothing of my domestic economy, it is too confused, but everything goes on desirably; it is a wonderful show here, naturally. Wieland is very amiable; we always keep together and I am only too fond of

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

being among his children. His wife is thoroughly good and like Mama La Roche. Adieu; ask Mama to open all letters in French envelopes. Here is one back. Give it to my father with the request to attend in my name to what is needful. . . . Adieu. Greet the dear Gerocks and Max. Write me something of the fate of that unhappy one. Give this letter to Mama to read. G."

Early in January (1776) he writes her: "I ought to send a letter to my mother, therefore, I address one to you. Together you may enjoy and digest it. I am still in the most desirable position in the world. I am hovering over all the most secret and important matters, have a happy influence, enjoy myself, learn and so on. But now I am in want of money, for nobody lives on air, so I just want to say, dear Aunt, consider it over with mother whether the father has sufficient sense of the dazzling splendour of his son to give me 200 fl. or a part of it. If that does not answer, mother must write to Merck and tell him to send it to me. The most convenient way would be to send it in gold in the mail coach among other things. Take this, dear Aunt, on your shoulders and do it in the most correct way; for I must be correct in what is my father's. I can write nothing in detail. Time will show. Write me sometimes, please, for however well off I am I often need

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

it. . . . I have just received the box with the provisions."

In the middle of February, 1776, he wrote this same friend a letter in which, for the first time, he mentions his fast-developing love for Frau von Stein. "I hear nothing from you as you hear nothing from us, yet you must learn a good deal from Frau Aja and I have thought that you sometimes write to me in your heart that I may not become quite a stranger to you. I accommodate myself here to the life and the life to me. I wish I could write to you in complete detail but it cannot be, so many threads run through each other, so many twigs from the stem cross each other. . . .

"I shall stay here and play my rôle as well as I can as long as it pleases me and fate. If it were only for two years, still it is in any case better than the inactive life at home, where, with the utmost desire, I can do nothing. Here at least I have two duchies before me. At present I have only arrived at learning to know the country, an occupation which, while it gives me much amusement, develops in the Duke a love for work, and as I know him thoroughly I am, with regard to many things, completely at my ease. With Wieland I lead a sweet domestic life, dining and supping there when I am not at Court. The girls here are very pretty and good. I get on very



SCHILLER AT THE COURT OF WEIMAR.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar

DUCHESS LOUISE.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

well with them. A noble soul is Frau von Stein, to whom, as might be said, I am attached and firmly annexed. Louise and I live together only in glances and syllables; she is and ever will be an angel. With the Duke's mother I have very good times and carry on all sorts of jokes and pranks. You cannot imagine how many good young fellows and good heads are assembled here; we hold together, get on splendidly, dramatize one another and keep the Court at a distance. Send me as soon as possible some long ladies' feathers, you know about such cocks-combs, two rose coloured, three white, as fine as you can get them. . . ."

A little later he tells his sympathetic correspondent that he feels that his father should give him "an outfit and dowry" just as he had given his sister upon her marriage. He explains that, though the Duke has again presented him with one hundred ducats, he is "still in debt to all sorts of people." In April he writes for "a dozen fine Dutch linen pocket handkerchiefs, very large, and a pair of very good cuffs." And he adds, evidently in answer to an inquiry on "Tante's" part, "Nothing more of Lili, she is a thing of the past. I have long hated her people in my deepest heart and I sincerely pity the poor creature that she was born amongst such a race."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Lili was indeed a thing of the past. For he is now giving presents to Frau von Stein while making himself irresistible, for her sake, with cuffs and fine linen. For four months his attitude towards this lady had been one of the warmest admiration. It was at Kochburg that he first came to know her as she was, and there, on the inner surface of the simple writing table, he inscribed the line, "Goethe den 6 Debr. '75" in characters which many a pilgrim has since journeyed far to see. In the quiet domestic life of this retired country-place Charlotte could come much nearer Goethe than when they were at Court, and very likely she now showed him something of her inmost nature and talked over with him that marriage of her sister Louise to Major von Imhoff, about which she had so many misgivings. Small wonder, too, for to marry this girl Von Imhoff had cheerfully sold his first wife to Warren Hastings! The divorce by which this sale had been made possible has its bearing, as an example of what occasionally happened at that period, on the perplexities which Goethe and Charlotte soon found themselves called upon to face. Its story is, therefore, worth telling here.

Carl Christian Adam von Imhoff began his career as groom of the chamber at the Court of Württemberg and acquitted himself so well in the Seven Years'

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

War that he was made a major and honourably discharged as such. Then he embraced the profession of a portrait painter, for which he had some capacity, and had he not hampered himself by marrying the dowerless daughter of a poor corporal's widow, he would doubtless have made great strides in this calling. But, his own country not showing such appreciation of him as he felt to be his desert, he established himself in London until, in 1769, being still in search of a promising field for his talents, he took ship from that port for Madras. Hastings was now a widower of thirty-seven and had for five years been a member of the India Council. He at once fell victim to the feminine softness and girlish beauty of Marianne von Imhoff and she responded to his passion. She had never loved Von Imhoff and so, when, towards the end of the voyage, a divorce was proposed,—Hastings offering Von Imhoff a large sum of money if he would concur, — she made no objection but, on the contrary, agreed to do all that was required of her to bring the affair to a successful issue. In Germany at that period divorces were frequent and easily obtained. Public sentiment justified them; the law authorized them. All that was necessary was that Marianne should continue under her husband's protection until all the legal forms had been executed. The much-desired documents reached

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

India from Germany just as Hastings was appointed governor-general and had moved from Madras to Calcutta. And whatever the truth may be about his rule of India he showed himself in this situation to be a good deal of a man. That Marianne might not be separated from the two children she had had by Imhoff, he himself adopted them; and he had the marriage rites that united him to the artist's cast-off wife, solemnized according to the requirements of the English church and state. Whereupon the charming daughter of a German corporal entered upon a career of almost regal grandeur for which she showed herself to be not unfitted — and Von Imhoff returned to his native land to marry a sweet girl of noble lineage by means of the money for which he had sold his plebeian wife!

How much of all this Charlotte related to Goethe as they sat together in the quiet, high-studded rooms of the Kochberg castle we, of course, have no means of knowing, but it is quite probable that she gave him her full confidence for their friendship was every day deepening and strengthening and soon their extraordinary correspondence was to begin. His letters during those first months exhibit the ardent young poet being diligently disciplined by a woman still virtuously of the opinion that it is not becoming in a wife to have a passionate lover. Yet,

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

as early as March 25, 1776, after less than four months of acquaintance, Goethe, returning from a journey, wrote to her: "Beyond Naumburg the sun arose to meet me! Dear friend, a sight full of hope, fulfilment and prophecy . . . the sun shining as golden as ever, not alone to these eyes but to this heart as well. Oh, it is the spring which never runs dry! the fire which never goes out, not even in eternity. Best of women, not in thee either, who often fanciest that the holy spirit of life has forsaken thee." These closing words read almost like a quotation from what is generally regarded as an authentic letter from Frau von Stein (the only one which survives) preserved in *Die Geschwister*. This letter reads: "The world is again growing dear to me — I had become so alienated from it — and it is all through you. My heart reproaches me; I feel that I am preparing agony for you as well as for myself. Six months ago I was ready to die but I am so no longer."

Small wonder that this tired, faded woman, who had suffered much from life, felt herself renewed in her inmost being by the adoration which Goethe now lavished upon her. He lived within a short walk from her house and they met constantly at Court as well as in her own home. Thus his notes have frequent allusions to the commonplace happenings

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

of everyday life in Weimar to take the curse off when their intimacy of tone (die Vertraulichkeit des Tones) ¹ became such as might be misunderstood. For the most the letters are happy ones, quite different from the gloomy epistles which make up the bulk of *Werther*. And sometimes, instead of a letter, there would come a poem, as when, on February 12, he dispatched to her the following, written "on the side of the Ettersberg."

WANDERER'S NIGHT SONG

"Thou who dost in Heaven bide,
Every pain and sorrow stillest,
Him whom twofold woes betide
With a twofold solace fillest,
Oh, this tossing, let it cease!
What means all this pain, unrest?
Soothing peace
Come, oh come into my breast."²

Charlotte showed this lovely poem to her pious mother, who wrote on the back of it: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Well might Goethe warn his beloved not to let her mother see any of his letters!

¹ Cf. *Charlotte von Stein und Corona Schröter* by Heinrich Düntzer, p. 4.

² Translation by George H. Calvert.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

That wise old lady did not need to read Goethe's love-letters, however, to know that her daughter was in a dangerous situation. Nor did the daughter need to be rebuked categorically in order to understand that she must make her lover write and act with more restraint.

When she returned to Weimar, toward the end of February, after a short absence, she appears to have told him plainly that he must learn to regard her as a "sister" only. This had its effect, for a little while. The next morning he writes: "How quietly and sweetly I have slept! How happy I was to arise and greet the sun, the first time for a fortnight with a light heart, and how full of thanks to thee, Angel of Heaven, to whom I owe so much. I must say to you that you are the only one among the women who have given me love, whose affection is such as can make me happy. . . . I lie at thy feet and kiss thy hands." And then a little later, "You are the only one that I can love without being tortured by my passion. . . . Oh that my sister had a brother who should be to her what you are to me. . . ." Goethe was not the man, however, to permit a woman with whom he was in love long to be a "sister" to him, and we are not surprised to find that this phase is past by the first of May, for he writes: "To-day I shall not see you. Your presence yesterday made so

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

wonderful an impression on me that I know not as yet whether I am well or ill from it." That evening he wrote: "Thou art right to make me a saint, that is to say to remove me from thy heart. Holy as thou art, I cannot make thee a saint. To-morrow, therefore. . . . Well, I will not see thee. Good night!"

Dread of appearances and keen distrust of herself seem to have seized Charlotte about this time. On the back of one of his letters she writes:

"Ob's Unrecht ist, was ich empfinde,
Und ob ich büßen muss die mir so liebe Sünde
Will mein Gewissen mir nicht sagen;
Vernicht 'es Himmel du! Wenn mich's je konnt anklagen."

Düntzer thinks ¹ that the verse is not Charlotte's own but merely a quotation which we may take as expressing her determination not to let herself grow too fond of Goethe. Accordingly she firmly tells him once again that he must moderate the tone of his letters, if not for her sake, for that of the world. To which he replies in a passionate outburst: "Even this relation, the purest, most beautiful, most sincere, that I have ever borne to any woman except my sister, this, too, disturbed! If I am not to live with you, your love is of as little help to me as the love of my absent friends, in which I am so rich, and all this

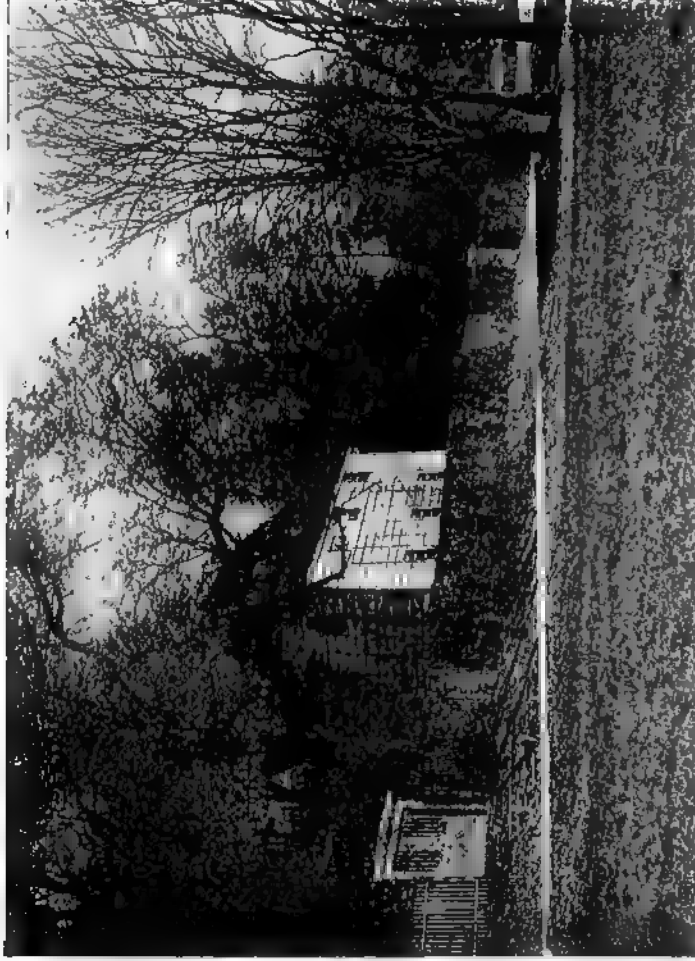
¹ *Charlotte von Stein und Corona Schröter*, p. 84 et seq.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

for the sake of the world. The world, which itself can be nothing to me, is not even willing that thou shalt be anything to me! You know not what you are doing. The hand of one who shuts himself up in solitude and does not hear the voice of love, presses heavy where it lies." [May 24, 1776.]

Yet Goethe, in his lucid intervals, knew perfectly well that he was jeopardizing Charlotte's good name, even in Weimar, where, at this time, the duty of a wife in the matter of a lover was not too stern for comfort.¹ This is proved by letters written to the Countess Stolberg about the time of the one just quoted. One of these runs: "I dined with the Duke; after dinner I went to Frau von Stein, whom I have so often to thank for the becalming of my heart, and for many of the purest blessings." Two days later he writes again to the Countess about his sister who is in trouble, begging that she send her a letter: "Oh, that you were in close friendship together," he then exclaims. "That, in her loneliness, a beam of light from thee shone upon her, and on the other hand that from her to thee there came, in the hour of trouble, a word of comfort! Become known to each other. Be to one another what I cannot be. *Those who are true women should love no men. We are*

¹ Schiller wrote of the Weimar women: "There is not one of them who has not had a *liaison*."



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.

GOETHE'S GARDEN - HOUSE AT WEIMAR.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

but continued to make it a favourite retreat. He took possession of this charmingly secluded spot towards the end of April and there, very soon, he was entertaining the Duke and Duchess as well as Wieland, Charlotte and the children of both households. It had been necessary to remodel somewhat the tiny cottage which was on the place when Goethe moved in, and during the building period the poet slept out of doors. Hence we find him writing on May 3, "Good morning, here is asparagus. How were you yesterday? Philip baked me a cake; and thereupon, wrapped up in my blue coat, I laid myself on a dry corner of the terrace and slept amid thunder, lightning and rain so gloriously that my bed was afterwards quite disagreeable." On the 19th he writes, "Thanks for the breakfast. I send you something in return. Last night I slept on the terrace, wrapped in my blue coat, awoke three times, at 12, 2, and 4, and each time there was a new splendour in the heavens."

Not only did he sleep out of doors; he also bathed with the Duke in the nearby Ilm, by moonlight, as well as when the morning sun was shining, in December as enjoyably as during summer months. The "Philip" mentioned in the letters was the chief factotum of this modest little household and we shall encounter many references to his varied services as

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

we pursue the story of Goethe's life in Weimar. On one occasion we read: "Last night I fell asleep soon after I went to bed; Philip brings me a letter; half awake I read that Lili is married, turn over and go to sleep again. How I worship fate that it deals so with me! Everything at the right time, dear angel, good night."

This note of quiet content with life is the prevalent one in the letters throughout the whole second year of Goethe's residence in Weimar. Passionate outbursts are now conspicuous by their absence and the conventional *Sie* is seldom displaced by the more intimate *du*. But all the while the bond between Goethe and Charlotte is becoming more and more sure. Sometimes the poet tried to explain to himself the extraordinary fascination this woman had for him, but he was never able to do this to his own satisfaction. "It is only by the theory of the transmigration of souls that I can account for the power she exercises over me," he once wrote his friend Wieland. "*Yes, we were formerly, we must have been man and wife. Now, I can find no name for us.*" Little kindnesses are chiefly the expression of their mutual affection. Out of his garden he sends her flowers or a choice early vegetable. • Then he invites himself to dine with her, goes to tell stories in the evening to her children or

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

summons them to his home to see some fireworks. The relationship now seems to be exceedingly placid at least on the surface. When he has been in Weimar two years he writes to her: "To live over those years again! . . . To take in with one look the morning that I first waked up in Weimar, two years ago, up to to-day is most strange to me, at once gladsome and affecting. How much fate has given me."

Yet that the Goethe of the Werther period has not quite been lost in the self-satisfied minister of state who is beloved of Charlotte von Stein we find from this letter: "Yesterday, on leaving you, I had wondrous thoughts, among others, whether I really love you, or whether your presence delights me like that of a very clear looking-glass which mirrors oneself so distinctly." He is evidently "warm" here, as the children say, in his guess as to why he found Charlotte so satisfactory. For she was not really a woman of great intelligence. "Frau von Stein wearies me with her talk of what she knows nothing about," Anna Amalia once impatiently remarked. They were friends, these two. But they were also women. And Anna Amalia was too genuinely clever not to resent affectation of cleverness.

Yet just because she listens to him with never-failing sympathy and always soothes and rests him

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Charlotte becomes constantly more and more dear to our poet. And so the years pass by. In August, 1780, we find Goethe declaring, in a letter to Lavater, that his burdens of state and his travail as a poet are greatly lightened by the "charm of a beautiful love with which Frau von Stein seasons my life. One after the other she has inherited my mother, sister and all the women I have loved; and there has been woven between us a bond like the bonds of nature."

The flower of Goethe's feeling for his beloved one at this period we find in *Iphigenia* and *Tasso*. In no earlier or later work has he glorified womanly worth with so ethereal, one might say so youthful a devotion, as in these two dramas. In the one the sober gentle priestess, secure in the purity of nature, who trains and directs to good the advances of her friend, heals the sick spirit of her brother, and, through clearness of soul, reconciles contending men and conflicting duties; in the other, a woman purified by suffering, who, with self-renunciation, and tender wisdom, loves the poet, controls and yet cannot subdue him. The elements for both plays are found in the years of Goethe's life just past. *Iphigenia*, which Düntzer pronounces the "poetic glorification of the calm which Charlotte had at last brought into the soul of this impetuous susceptible poet," Goethe had



GOETHE ACTING BEFORE THE COURT OF WEIMAR.
From the painting by Kaulbach.



ROYAL LADIES IN THE GARDEN AT WEIMAR.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

written with the intention that it should first be acted in connection with the churching of the Duchess after the birth of her little daughter, on February 3, 1779. It was not given, however, until Easter week of that year, the cast for the occasion being as follows:

ORESTES	GOETHE
PYLADES	PRINCE CONSTANTINE
THOAS	KNEBEL
ARKAS	SEIDLER
IPHIGENIA	CORONA SCHRÖTER

Goethe's acting of the leading part created an immense sensation in the little world whose hero he then was. "Never shall I forget," one of the audience has recorded, "the impression he made as Orestes in his Grecian costume. One might have fancied him Apollo. . . ."

Of course the Frau von Stein was moved by this play but it was really *Tasso*, we must conclude, which worked in her the great change towards Goethe. For whereas *Iphigenia* had reflected only the soothing and satisfying side of the poet's love, we see in *Tasso* a pulsating and ardently living thing painted against a background of court life which is no less that of Weimar because it is

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

labelled Ferrara. In speaking of the play in later years to Eckermann, Goethe said of it, "It is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Tasso at Ferrara is in reality Goethe at Weimar, not indeed Goethe as he was, for he had precisely the balance of character which Tasso wants, but Goethe, as he was tempted to be, — as he feared in the first of his court-life to become.

The little society which was utilized by the poet, as he was writing the play, knew perfectly what was being done. Herder had hardly read the first scene when he remarked to his wife, "Goethe cannot do otherwise than idealize himself and write everything out of his own experience." The three principal characters, Tasso, the princess, and Alphonso, are, almost photographically indeed, Goethe, Frau von Stein (with a slight admixture of the Duchess), and Karl August. Those familiar with life at Weimar during the period between 1776 and 1786 were wont to say that reading this play was like listening to a conversation. For us, just now, the interest of the drama lies in the fact that it began to be written at the very time when the Frau von Stein was confessing to her lover more openly than she had heretofore done her warm affection for him. "Do you not observe," his letter of March 25, 1781, enquires, "how love provides for your poet? Some months

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

ago the next scene would have been impossible for me, but how easily it will now flow from my heart." Two days later he writes, "In the quiet of the morning I have pronounced a panegyric upon *thee* in particular." On April 19 he wrote, "As you may take to yourself everything that Tasso says I have already written so much to you to-day that I can neither add anything to it nor improve upon it." On the following day: "I shall tell thee nothing of myself nor of the morning. While writing at *Tasso* I have been directly worshipping thee." Three days later there is a plain reference to Tasso's soliloquy in the second act in the following: "I felt so happy this morning that a rain awakened me to *Tasso*. What I have written is certainly good as an invocation to thee; whether it is good as a scene and in its connection I know not." Just because Goethe was now in exactly the mood to write perfect love scenes he could not at this time finish the play; it was one of the essential features of the plot that Tasso and the princess should be torn asunder, and Goethe and Frau von Stein were not torn asunder for five years yet. During these years *Tasso* remained a two-act fragment.

Whether one accepts the opinion of those commentators who declare that, in 1781, Charlotte surrendered utterly to Goethe because she feared to

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

lose him to Corona Schröter, or whether one concludes that their love, though now acknowledged on both sides, still continued Platonic — whichever view one adopts it is perfectly plain, from Goethe's letters, that a notable change in their relations dates from this period. The familiar *du* is now back for good and the passionate fervour of the poet's heart expresses itself unrebuked. How literally the unmistakable eroticism of the language is to be interpreted I cannot say. Metchnikoff in his *Prolongation of Life* has a reference to 'Moebius' *Goethe* which he gives thus: "Some of Goethe's letters to Baroness von Stein, about 1781, are clear evidence that their relations were erotic" and this dictum has been much used by later writers who have not taken the trouble to look up the original passage in Moebius. Had they done so they would have found that what the author says, in this very remarkable study of Goethe's traits and characteristics, is just what I have been trying to say, that the *letters* of this period are "unmistakably erotic in character." It seems also to be true that Goethe wished Charlotte to get a divorce from her husband in order that he and she might be married. Divorce with a direct view to other unions was not uncommon in the Germany of that period, as was seen in the case of the Imhoffs, and the marriage between Stein and

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

Charlotte could probably have been annulled easily enough. That no legal steps ever were taken in the matter is said to have been due to the opposition of the lady's family. But that Goethe's mind reverted constantly to the thought of what life would mean to him if this woman were his for all time is plain to be seen. "The Jews, when they pray, bind phylacteries about their arms; so do I bind around my arm, when I pray, thy dear band [a ribbon she had given him] that I may partake of thy goodness, wisdom, moderation and patience," he writes on Monday, March 12, 1781, at "half past eleven at night." Earlier in this letter he had been saying that his soul has so grown into hers that he has no words with which to express how closely he feels himself bound to her. "You know that I am inseparable from you and that neither heights nor depths can part us now. Would that there were but some vow or sacrament," he exclaims passionately, "that could make me surely and eternally thine!"

From Ilmenau, on July 8, he adds, at the foot of his daily letter from that place of mines to which he had gone on business, this postscript, which may be held to refer to the divorce rumour: "We are truly married now, that is to say, we are bound by a band the woof of which consists of love and joy and the web of crosses, trouble and misery." Yet this very note

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

concludes with the message, "Greet Stein." One circumstance which greatly favoured increased intimacy between Goethe and Charlotte was that he had now (spring of 1782) moved into the town house with which he is to-day chiefly associated and from which it was only two minutes' walk by the garden route, to the Steins' house. Frau von Stein had a key to the garden gate and, as there were no houses to overlook, no crowds to observe, however frequently she may have traversed the little lane which connected the two places, the chances are that she came often to call on Goethe in his handsome new home.

Perhaps, it was at this time and in connection with Frau von Stein that the episode occurred which we find the poet thus describing to Eckermann (in 1827) in the course of a conversation on what we of to-day call telepathy:

"Between lovers this power is particularly strong, and acts even at a distance. . . . I recollect an instance during the first years of my residence here. . . . I had taken a long journey and had returned some days; but being detained late at night by court affairs, I had not been able to visit my beloved. Besides, our mutual affection had already attracted attention and I was reluctant to pay my visits by day lest I should increase the

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

common talk. On the fourth or fifth evening, however, I could resist no longer and I was on the road to her and stood before the house, before I had thought of it. I went softly upstairs and was on the point of entering her room, when I heard by the different voices that she was not alone. I went down again unnoticed and was quickly in the streets, which at that time were unlighted. In an impassioned and angry mood I roamed about the town in all directions for about an hour, and passed the house once more full of passionate thoughts of my beloved. At last I was on the point of returning home, when I once more went past her house and remarked that she had no light. 'She must have gone out,' I said to myself, 'but whither in this dark night and where shall I meet her?' I afterwards went through many streets, met many people, and was often deceived inasmuch as I several times fancied I saw her form and size, but on near approach, invariably found that it was not she.

"I then firmly believed in a strong mutual influence and that I could attract her to me by a strong desire. I also believed myself surrounded by invisible beings of a higher order, whom I entreated to direct her steps to me or mine to her. . . . In the mean time I had gone down the esplanade and had reached the small house in which Schiller afterwards

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

lived, when it occurred to me to turn back toward the palace and then go down a little street to the right. I had scarcely taken a hundred steps in this direction when I saw a female form coming towards me which perfectly resembled her I expected. The street was faintly lighted by the weak rays which now and then shone from a window, and since I had already been often deceived in the course of the evening with an apparent resemblance, I did not feel courage to speak to her while in doubt. We passed close to each other so that our arms touched. I stood still and looked about me; she did the same. 'Is it you?' said she, and I recognized her beloved voice. 'Now,' said I, 'my hopes have not deceived me; I have sought you with the greatest eagerness; my feelings told me that I should certainly find you; now I am happy and I thank God that my presentiment has proved true.' 'But you wicked one,' said she, 'why did you not come? I heard to-day by chance that you have been back three days and I have wept the whole afternoon because I thought you had forgotten me. Then, an hour ago, I was seized with a longing and an uneasiness on your account such as I cannot describe. There were two female friends with me whose visit appeared interminable. At last, when they were gone, I involuntarily seized my hat and cloak, and was

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

impelled to go out into the air and darkness I knew not whither; you were constantly in my mind and I could not help thinking that I should meet you.'

"Whilst she thus spoke truly from her heart, we still held each other's hands and pressed them, and gave each other to understand that absence had not cooled our love. I accompanied her to her door and into the house and she went up the dark stairs before me, holding my hand and drawing me after her. My happiness was indescribable; both because I at last saw her again, and also because my belief had not deceived me and I had not been deluded in my sense of an invisible influence."¹

It particularly pleased Goethe to think that "invisible influences" were concerned in the strong attraction which Charlotte von Stein had for him. For when she was kind and tranquil she fascinated him thoroughly, and, if she had had the tact not to upbraid him, no matter how great the temptation, her power over him would probably never have been lessened. Even in the dark days which soon dawned for them both, he valued her esteem above that of any of his other friends and when she at length relaxed her disapproval of him and became again

¹ Eckermann p. 291, et seq., translation by John Oxenford. Dr. Wilhelm Bode thinks that Goethe "intentionally clouded" this passage in order that the lady in the case might not be recognized.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

"kind," his gratitude was beyond expression. But we are anticipating. The year 1781 went out with their faith in each other what it had been for five years now and he was able to write in his day-book as December expired, "Mit ☉ still und vergnügt gelebt." The astronomical sign of the sun stands in this very interesting volume¹ for the name of Frau von Stein.

The New Year breaks brightly and for nearly two months the daily letters express deep but untroubled devotion with an occasional redeeming dash of playfulness, as when we find the poet writing on March 2: "I send you herewith a playbill from the French theatre. You will find announced there une tragédie d'un Mr. Göthe qui s'est acquis une grande renommée par ses écrits et qui naquit en 1749 pour vous aimer en 1782 et toute sa vie." The next day (Sunday) he sends her this charming note: "I begin this day with the hope that my dear one will see me ere it closes and I send her a lovely rose and the wish that my love for her may ever be as beautiful as this flower." When he is away from Weimar there is deepened solicitude, for Charlotte's health was by no means rugged as he knew only too well. Thus on the evening of April 7 he writes from the neighbourhood of Eisenach: "I feared thou might'st be ill and

¹ *Goethe's Tagebuch aus den Jahren 1776-1782*, edited by Robert Keil.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

thy letter gives me the sad certainty. Hope, which ever kindly deceives us, tells me that thou art already better again. It is true, dearest, is it not, that thou knowest I never swerve from thee? Would that I were by thy side that I might wait upon thee and tend thee." Soon he is really alarmed about her health for, on April 9, he writes: "Thy last note caused in me many sorrowful thoughts; in the night I wept bitterly as I imagined that I might lose thee. Against everything else that might happen to me I have a counterweight in myself, against this, nothing. Hope helps us to live. Now I think thou art well or will be well when you receive this note." Again, in the same letter: "What do I not owe to thee, dearest? Even if thou didst not so distinguish me with thy love, if thou only bore with me along with others, I should still be bound to dedicate my whole being to thee. For, without thee, I should never have been able to renounce my dearest sins. How could I see the world so clearly or conduct myself so successfully in it if there were left to me nothing to seek there?" But her health improves somewhat and, at the end of the year, he is again writing cheerfully though once more he tells her how much he feels himself in her debt. "I owe to thee, dear Lotte, my happiness at home and my enjoyment abroad, for the calmness, the equanimity with which

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

I receive and give rests on the ground of thy love. Farewell. To-day I hope for a letter from thee with the news that thou art well. Adieu, my dear one, my only one, my life and talisman!"

And yet it was soon, now, to come to an end, this puzzling relationship which had helped Goethe to find himself and had restored to Frau von Stein her keen interest in people and in life. Through the years 1783, 1784 and 1785, to be sure, the daily letters continue and always they are full of tenderness and of loving thought for the dear one's health and happiness. But Italy begins to beckon and soon her lure grows irresistible. It was not, however, that Goethe loved Charlotte less but Rome more. For a long time it had been a habit of his to ponder, when the memorable days of his life recurred, year after year, on what he had accomplished and what he had still to do. November 7¹ had been one of these serious days with him and when, in 1785, his tenth year in Weimar came to a close, it was sharply borne in upon him that he must pull away. He felt that he owed it to his artistic development to drop now the business cares that were weighing him down and so be able to bathe his spirit in the bright joyous life of the southland towards which his heart had never ceased to yearn. His first allusion in the letters to

¹ The date of his arrival in Weimar.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

Charlotte, of his tremendous longing for Italy, is found in a note written November 10, 1785. Two months later he bitterly compares the rude German tongue with the melodious Italian language, and soon after this he begins secretly to make preparations for departure. To Frau von Stein, he writes when he is about to leave: "I desire to get away. Farewell, sweetheart, I am thine." It may have been his belief, that somehow, through this journey, he and Charlotte might come really to belong to each other. From Terni he wrote her, on October 27, a letter whose last sentence has been interpreted to mean that he now has stronger hopes than ever of becoming her husband one day: "Sitting in a cave which, a year ago, suffered from an earthquake, I address my prayer to thee, my dear guardian angel! How spoilt I am I feel now for the first time. To live ten years by thee, beloved by thee, and now in a strange world! I knew that it would be like this and nothing but the highest necessity had power to force me to take the resolution which I did take. Let us have no other thought than to pass our lives together."

Goethe seems to have meant to be very constant in his letters to Charlotte for he sent her every week his diary, out of which was afterwards made up his volume *The Italian Journey*, and he made arrange-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ments by which she ought to have been quickly informed how he had fared during the early days of his trip. But, by some miscarriage, the letter which he wrote at Verona, a fortnight after he had left Carlsbad, did not reach her for many weeks, and not unnaturally, she suffered horribly from what seemed a most flagrant breach of faith on the part of the man who had for ten years been writing to her every day. One very touching little poem, in which she gave expression to her pain and loneliness, has been thus translated by G. H. Calvert for his biographical volume: ¹

“Fly, ye thoughts that were my own,
As my friend from me hath flown!
Of the hours ye now remind me
Spent with him so oft, so kindly.
Now I am for aye alone,
Lonely now, for he is gone.”

But the delayed mail came at last and on Christmas Day she wrote thus cheerfully to her young friend,² Charlotte von Lengefeld, the future wife of

¹ *Charlotte von Stein: A Memoir.*

² The friendship between these two Charlottes was a very beautiful one. “You are the only lover who has never given me the least pain,” the older woman once wrote the younger. And Fräulein von Lengefeld was constantly urging Schiller, — at the beginning of their acquaintance, and when he was in Weimar by himself — to accept the hospitality Frau von Stein graciously

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

Schiller: "I have had many beautiful letters from Goethe in Rome which I will let you read when you come to us. His intention certainly is to come back to us, but Heaven often determines otherwise than according to the will of us mortals. He quitted his friends a little uncivilly."

The note of criticism which creeps into the letter just quoted recurs from time to time. On September 1, 1787, she writes from Kochburg to her sister-in-law that she is now reconciled to the separation from her friend which, last year, was so bitter to her, but a little later she adds: "You have in Weimar celebrated very pleasantly the birthday of the absent one. I am glad I was not there; I could not be joyful on that day. . . . Goethe will remain in Rome till Easter. Last night I had a singular dream about him. I feared some misfortune was to happen to him at the time he thought of coming back to us."

The "misfortune," for so she regarded it, did happen when Goethe had been at home only a few weeks. But that it assumed the very serious proportions it soon took on was largely Charlotte von Stein's own

proffered. "I very well know that it is difficult to come near to her," she admitted, "for her illnesses and other things make her locked in herself. It was only after knowing her for many years that I began to love her as I do. But now the better I know her the more I prize her."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

fault. She was not very kind to her lover, when he came back to her, and instead of trying to help him forget all the joy he had left behind him, she made the mistake of being exacting, querulous and cold. "Thou hast but one rival, a colossal head of Juno," he had written her from Rome, in January, 1787; but this ceased soon afterwards to be true and she, with her woman's instinct, knew, almost immediately upon Goethe's return to Weimar, fifteen months later, that he was no longer what he had been when he went away.

It was not until early in 1789, however, that she made the discovery that she had been definitely supplanted in the poet's affections. Then she gave him the choice¹ of renouncing either her or the girl of the people who had bewitched him. Goethe had hoped to keep her for a friend while having Christiane Vulpius for a mistress, and in the remarkable letter which he sent her, on June 1, 1789, he reproaches her for feeling piqued. At the top of this letter Charlotte von Stein wrote "O!!!" and the men commentators seem quite unable to decide whether the exclamation is one of pain, of pity, or of indignation. I am sure no woman will fail to feel that all these emotions, and several more, were there expressed, for the letter is as follows:

¹ When she started, on May 4, for Ems to take the baths.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

" BELVEDERE, June 1.

" I thank thee for the letter which thou leftst me, although it troubled me in more ways than one. I delayed answering it, because in such a case it is difficult to be sincere and not give pain. How much I love thee, how fully I know my duty towards thee and Fritz, I have shown by my return from Italy. I should still be there had I conformed to the Duke's wish; Herder went thither, and as I did not foresee that I could be of service to the Crown-Prince, I had scarcely anything else in my thought but thee and Fritz.

" What I left behind in Italy, I will not now repeat; my confidence in regard to that thou hast received in an unfriendly enough way. Unhappily, when I arrived, thou wast in a peculiar mood, and I acknowledge that the manner in which you received me was exceedingly painful to me. I saw Herder and the Duchess set out with an empty place in the carriage which was urgently offered to me; I remained here for the sake of those friends for whom I had come, and this though I was stiffly told that I might just as well have stayed away, that I took no interest in people and so forth. And all this before there could have been any word about the affair which seems so to grieve thee!

" And what is this affair? Who is robbed by it?

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Who has a claim on the feelings that I give the poor creature? Who on the hours I pass with her?

“ Ask Fritz, ask the Herders, ask any one who knows me intimately, whether I am less sympathetic, less active, or less friendly than before? Whether I do not now, for the first time, rightly belong to them and to society? And it must be by a miracle if the best, the most intimate relation of all, that to thee, should have ceased. How vividly I have felt that it is still there when I have found thee disposed to talk with me on interesting subjects!

“ This, however, I must say; that the manner in which you have treated me hitherto I cannot endure. When I was inclined to talk, you shut my lips; when I wanted to share with you my experiences [in Italy] you reproached me with indifference; when I was active for my friends you accused me of coldness and neglect of you. You criticised my every look, found fault with my movements, my way of life, and put me always *mal à mon aise*. How can openness and confidence thrive if you repulse me with pre-determined ill-humour? I should like to add more did I not fear that in thy present mood it would irritate rather than conciliate thee.

“ Unhappily, thou hast long despised my advice in regard to coffee, and adopted a *régime* highly injurious to thy health. As though it were not

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

already difficult enough to overcome certain moral impressions, thou strengthenest the hypochondriacal, tormenting power of gloomy imaginations through a physical means whose injurious effects thou for a time acknowledgedst, and gave up to find thyself better. May the cure and the journey do thee good. I have not entirely lost hope that thou wilt again know me for what I am. Farewell. Fritz is happy and visits me constantly. The prince is well and lively."

Goethe knew a good deal about women before he broke with Frau von Stein but he learned a good deal more through this experience. When he was able to get perspective on the matter, he quite understood — what he gives no sign in the just quoted letter of even dimly guessing — that the depression and the reproaches, expressed and unexpressed, which he here declares due to "coffee," were all attributable to Charlotte's now-slighted love for him. "To me he is like a beautiful star that has fallen from my sky," she wrote to Lotte von Lengefeld. Her sorrow over the happiness of which she had been robbed was all the more intense since, in spite of the poet's "faithlessness," she continued to love him ardently. She told herself repeatedly that he had sadly degenerated but this only deepened her sorrow for him and her pity for herself. "I am often

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

so overcome with grief that I could weep," she wrote on May 27, 1791. Goethe suffered, too, for her sympathy had meant very much to him. A year after the separation, he wrote:

"Eine Liebe hatt' ich; sie war mir lieber als alles.
Aber ich hab' sie nicht mehr! Schweig, und ertrag den Verlust!"¹

But though Charlotte mourned in secret the loss of Goethe's devotion it was several years before she could speak of him with anything except bitterness. In November, 1793, she writes to her son Fritz: "Goethe has now a little daughter, too, at which he is excessively delighted, for he is as friendly as an earwig, makes French puns and himself stood godfather to the little child." Later, when, as part of his state duty, the poet reopened the mines at Ilmenau,² she writes Fritz that she has just sold four shares at a reduced price and adds: "I no longer have faith in anything our departed friend has a hand in." Even her husband seemed to her lovable by

¹ "A loved one I formerly had; she was to me dearer than all.

But now I have her no more. Be silent, endure thou the loss!"

² Ilmenau was connected with some of her tenderest memories of Goethe, too; for it was while there that he wrote (in 1779) his exquisite little poem, "Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh," which I have ventured to translate:

Over every hill-top is peace,
Throughout the woods all noises cease,
Little birds sleep in each leafy bough.
Wait but in patience, soon *thou* shalt sleep, now.



CHARLOTTE VON STEIN'S HOME IN WEIMAR.

Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.



GOETHE'S HOUSE IN THE GOETHE - PLATZ.
Copyright by Louis Hdd, Weimar.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

contrast, for when he died, at the end of December, 1793, she wrote: "He looked beautiful in death. All that was unpleasant in his countenance, — caused by the mental malady which vexed him and others, — a gentle death had brought again into rest and restored his fine equilibrium."

Gradually, however, through her warm love for Charlotte von Lengefeld, who became the wife of Schiller, Charlotte and Goethe got back upon an almost friendly footing. But this did not come about until she had rid herself of her burden of jealousy by writing *Dido*, in which Goethe is caricatured under the name of Orgo as a selfish, sensual poet and faithless lover. Once, at the beginning of 1796, she had an encounter with him under the Schillers' roof at Jena, of which she wrote thus to Fritz: "I had not seen him for several months. He was horribly stout, with short arms, and kept his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets. Schiller beside him looked like a heavenly genius. . . . I should like to know though [she was a true woman!] if to Goethe I seem as much changed in appearance as he does to me."

Charlotte, however, loved children and when Goethe's little son, August, came to play with Schiller's Carl, — on an occasion when Lotte and the boy were staying at the Stein home in Weimar,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

while Schiller was Goethe's guest near by, — she found herself attracted to the child in spite of her loathing for his mother. To Fritz she thereupon writes: "He seems to be a good child. I gave him some playthings which made him very happy, and after several pauses in which he seemed to be counting his presents in his little head, he said emphatically, 'I thank you.' I can at times perceive in him separately the distinguished nature of the father and the commoner one of the mother." Soon after this she sent a message to her former lover at Jena through Lotte Schiller: "Greet your husband cordially from me, and if you think proper, give also to the stout privy-councillor a good evening in my name." In the early part of the year 1797 she even dined at Goethe's house, — in a large company — and, not long afterwards, he and Schiller together dined with her.¹

¹ Dr. Wilhelm Bode, who has written a charming biography (in German) of Frau von Stein, amusingly points out that social intercourse between these two former friends was now greatly complicated by the fact that they had strikingly different tastes in the matter of temperatures. Goethe, since his return from Italy, always wanted the room very warm while Frau von Stein could not bear a house which was even comfortably heated. She protected herself against the rigours of her own home by heavy underclothing, but her guests, who had not so prepared themselves, were often obliged to keep on their wraps. Goethe, naturally, did not care to endanger his health by a too-constant acceptance of such frigid hospitality.

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

With a woman, sentiment dies hard and that Charlotte von Stein never ceased to regret the lover she had lost we have very many proofs. One more, however, will suffice and with it our chapter may well close. Shortly before the Schillers came to Weimar to live, she wrote to Lotte a letter in which may be found the following extract: "August is with me; his little face does me good. He wanted to write to your little Carl and was delighted with the envelope I made for him. It is odd that he should have picked out of my writing-desk the seal, *All for love*, which his father gave me twenty years ago. Don't let Goethe see it."

CHAPTER IX

FRAU AJA

It is by the above picturesque name that Goethe's mother is known to readers of biography. She has become a familiar figure in the literature of France by reason of the charming sketch ¹ done of her by M. Paul Bastier while in America Alfred Seymour Gibbs and in England William Thomas Arnold have vitalized her sprightly personality for an appreciative reading public. Gibbs was a student at Harvard at the time Charles Follen was there and he shared in the enthusiasm for things German with which the latter's name is indissolubly linked in America. The two were abroad together for a time — after Follen had been graduated in the class of 1849 — and the fruit of the ensuing impulse to German research on Gibbs' part appeared, twenty-five years later, in an article which gave the best and most lifelike portrait of Goethe's mother then available in English. This material, together with Gibbs' description of the Goethe House at Frankfort and translations of a

¹ *La Mère de Goethe, d'après sa Correspondance.*

FRAU AJA

number of the letters written by Goethe's mother to her son, to Lavater, Wieland and others, appeared in book form¹ in 1880 and was certainly a valuable addition to our then very meagre knowledge of one of the most fascinating figures in all literature.

It remained, however, for William Thomas Arnold, nephew of Matthew Arnold and grandson of the great headmaster, to contribute what has remained up to the present time the last word, printed in English, in the study of Goethe's mother. Arnold died in 1904 with his work still unpublished. But his material had been left in such shape that Janet Trevelyan was able to make from it a very delightful and valuable article on "Goethe's Mother," which was published in the *Quarterly Review* of the following year. Just about the same time there appeared the first complete collection of the Frau Rath's letters, edited by Herr Albert Köster. Thus it comes about that those to whom German, as well as English and French, are familiar tongues may now learn nearly all there is to know about this very interesting woman.

Rather oddly, however, greater familiarity with the life and character of Goethe's mother has had the effect of considerably lowering the estimation in which Goethe himself has so long been held by English-speaking people. It becomes plain that

¹ *Goethe's Mother*, by Alfred S. Gibbs. Dodd, Mead & Co.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

though his mother adored him — and he knew it — he took very little trouble, as the years went on, to satisfy her natural hunger for his bodily presence! “The result of my unbiassed examination of all the literature on the subject,” William Arnold writes, “in which examination I started with the usual preconception of Goethe’s greatness as a man as well as writer, is that she who bore him and loved him and forgave him and made excuses for his unpardonable neglect of her was one of the most loving, sweetest, and most long-suffering of mothers; while the illustrious Goethe was one of the most selfish, cold-blooded and least considerate of sons.”

A scathing judgment this, and one which it would be a great pleasure to gainsay. But facts are stubborn things and it is a fact that though Frankfort and Weimar are less than a hundred miles apart Goethe travelled that distance for the purpose of visiting his mother only six times during the thirty-three long years that she survived his translation to a wider field of usefulness. Yet she loved him, trusted him, yearned over him and made constant excuses for him. As late as 1798, indeed, she declares, in a letter to her grandson, August, that her own son has caused her nothing but joy. Only once is there even a shadow of reproach to be detected in the many letters which she sends her friends about him,

FRAU AJA

and that may be found in the almost involuntary cry which slips out as she is writing to the Duchess Amalia: "Son Wolf doesn't come to see me. And yet from East and West, South and North come many figures that might rather stay away."

Her house, "Casa Santa," as it soon came to be called, was a veritable shrine for literary pilgrims. To the Frankfort visit of the Counts Stolberg, which occurred just before Goethe left for Weimar, we owe the name by which Goethe's mother became known to all succeeding pilgrims. The Stolberg brothers had long worshipped from a distance the author of *Goetz* and *Werther*, and opportunity having offered to see him in the flesh, they hurriedly journeyed to Frankfort and were received by the Frau Rath with that eager hospitality which she always showed to Goethe's friends and admirers. Now these young men were true products of the "Sturm und Drang" period, boiling over with hatred for "tyrants." Of actual tyranny they knew nothing; that against which they rebelled was the tyranny of custom and convention; and the freedom for which they thirsted was freedom to follow the dictates of Nature. "If Nature suggested," Alfred Gibbs comments dryly, "that it was desirable to bathe by the wayside in broad daylight, they eagerly followed her dictates, and they inveighed all the more loudly against

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

tyrants, when certain rude minions of conventionalism assailed them with stones and drove them ignominiously away." Accordingly there was much talk of "tyrants" at the peaceful Goethe dinner-table and there was manifested an insatiable thirst for the blood of all such villains.

"My mother had scarcely heard of a tyrant in her life," says Goethe (telling this story in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*); "... But to turn these and similar expressions, which were becoming continually more violent, back to something cheerful, she betook herself to her cellar where her oldest wines lay carefully preserved in large casks. There she had stored away the vintages of 1706-19-28-48, which she had herself watched and tended and which were seldom broached except on solemn festive occasions. As she now set out the high-coloured wine in a cut-glass decanter she exclaimed, 'Here is true tyrants' blood. Rejoice yourselves in it; but banish all murderous thoughts from my house.' "

This scene is so similar to one in the *Legend of the Four Children of Aymon*, very well known in Germany, that it explains the title "Frau Aja" which the Stolbergs immediately bestowed upon their hostess and to which her friends clung for the remainder of her life. The original Aja was the sister of Emperor Charlemagne, the wife of Count Aymon

FRAU AJA

and the mother of his four sons. In the course of a quarrel—so the story runs—one of these sons has the misfortune to kill a son of the Emperor. Whereupon, accompanied by his three brothers, he goes into exile. In vain does Charlemagne pursue the youths; but the father, Aymon, being near at hand, is taken prisoner, the Emperor forcing from him an oath to deliver up his sons should they fall into his hands. The four brothers, after many adventures and an absence which covers several years, are seized with the desire to revisit their home but, on account of their father's oath, are afraid to present themselves in their proper persons. Accordingly, they compel some pilgrims, whom they meet as they journey thither, to change clothes with them, after which they beg for shelter and food before the castle gate, representing that they are pilgrims just returned from Rome. Frau Aja herself waits on them and, while they are eating and drinking and making merry, goes into the cellar and brings up some of the best wine, which she pours into a silver cup and gives to Rheinhold, the guilty brother. Of course, in the end, the mother recognizes her boys. But it is the part of the legend relating to the bringing up of the best wine from the cellar to which Frau Rath Goethe was indebted for her title.

She herself adopted the name with enthusiasm

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

and we soon find her calling herself nothing but Frau Aja in her letters to her intimates, — from the Dowager Duchess Amalia down to little Fritz von Stein, whom, from her earliest acquaintance with him, she enlists as a correspondent in order that she may, through him, come into as close contact as possible with the Great Belovéd with whom he lived. "Since you are constantly with my son and know more about him than any one else, how would it be," she urges the child, "if you were to keep a little diary, and send it to me every month? It need not, indeed, give you much trouble — only something in this way: 'Yesterday Goethe was at the play; in the evening invited out. To-day we had company,' and so on. In this way I should live as it were among you, should rejoice in your joys, and absence would lose much of its unpleasantness." Fritz acted on this suggestion and as a result Frau Aja heard much more than she had previously done of her son's everyday life. The charming letters which she wrote to Fritz, thanking him for the pleasure he was giving her, make us very glad of the arrangement.

All Frau Aja's letters are delightful reflections of her own buoyant and wholesome personality. Their quaint peculiarities of spelling and punctuation make them only the more eloquent of the woman behind the words. For though she was a daughter

FRAU AJA

of the chief magistrate of Frankfort, Elizabeth Textor had had but a scanty grounding in the humanities. Like our own Abigail Adams, who at just this same time in the history of the world was writing similarly naïve letters which are now a cherished part of American literature, Elizabeth Textor got the greater part of her education *after* her marriage and from her husband. Unlike Abigail Adams, however, she never ardently loved her tutor. Her one passion, indeed, appears to have been for quite a different person than the man she married. And it took place when she was at the tender age of eleven!

The object of her girlish fancy was the beautiful and melancholy figure of Emperor Charles VII, whose coronation she, as a privileged person, had watched from the clock-gallery of the old town hall in Frankfort. When the Emperor returned the next year she followed him about in a tremor of awe, as he made his pilgrimage from church to church, and knelt always at the very back among the beggars. So at least Bettina tells it nearly a hundred years later, adding that Frau Aja confided the facts to her and that "this had been her last as well as her first real passion." "Later she had had various likings," continues Bettina's narrative, "but never one which had come as such a mighty revelation, and at the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

very first step had opened such new and heavenly regions to her." Unless Bettina is indulging in one of her flights of fiction we have here an interesting side-light on Goethe's precocity in affairs of the heart. For the melancholy Emperor died in 1744 — when Elizabeth Textor was only thirteen!

The lovelorn Fräulein had, therefore, enjoyed for four years the luxury of mourning her Emperor in secret before she faced the real business of her life — that of being the wife of Herr Caspar Goethe, a rich doctor of laws twenty-one years her senior. Herr Goethe had been crammed with knowledge in three universities, sent on the grand tour to Italy, France and Holland, practised his profession for some years, and was now ready to settle down to the heavy domestic. He made it very heavy, too, from his young wife's point of view. For he devoted himself, with characteristic seriousness, to the training of her volatile young mind and it was not until the children gave him another outlet that she was released from school. Cornelia bitterly disliked her father — though in his own way he devotedly loved her — and Wolfgang, as we have seen, was impatiently contemptuous of him. So he must have had rather a lonely time of it in the house to whose repairs he gave so many years of concentrated thought and in which he passed away, not too much

FRAU AJA

regretted, in 1782. William Arnold feels strongly that the world has not been just to Goethe's father and explains the reason thus: "The poor old gentleman had no power of self-expression, whereas wife and son had it in the highest degree. So, naturally, they get the best of him with posterity." It seems to me, however, that Herr Goethe *did* express himself a good deal — and that posterity has not "warmed" to him just because of that fact.

The tender devotion of Frau Aja to her poor old husband during the seven years which remained to him after young Goethe's departure from Frankfort show that she possessed a keen sense of duty as well as many very engaging qualities. Though her philosophy of cheerfulness was at this time put to a very hard test we never find her grumbling or peevish and her patience and sympathy with the rather exacting invalid are most beautiful.

Her only joy was in the letters from Weimar — most of them written by Goethe's secretary-servant, Philip Seidel — and in looking forward to a possible visit from her best beloved. In 1771 Cornelia died, with the birth of her second child, and the parents' grief was piteous. Cornelia and her mother had been by no means such friends as, under the circumstances, one would have thought they might be, but

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Frau Aja was a mother none the less and her letter to Lavater, announcing Cornelia's death, reflects very real grief coupled with strong and enduring faith. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength," she writes (Frankfort, June 23, 1777). "His word shall surely stand. New, living, present witnesses are we who know that our Cornelia, our only daughter, is now in the grave; and indeed wholly unexpectedly; the flash and stroke were one. O dear Lavater, the poor mother had much, much to bear. My husband had been ill the whole winter — the careless shutting of a door would startle him — and to him I had to be the messenger of the death of his daughter, whom he loved above everything. My heart was as if crushed; but the thought, 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' sustained me, so that I did not sink under my grief. Without a belief as firm as a rock in God — the God who numbers the hairs of the head, without whom no sparrow falls; who knows the thought of my heart before it is formed, who hears me without my having need to cut myself with knives and lances till the blood gushed out; who in one word, is *love* — without belief in Him it would be impossible to bear any such thing." . . .

Though Goethe himself did not write often to his

FRAU AJA

heart-hungry mother all his friends wrote to her so that news came constantly from Weimar to cheer her loneliness in Frankfort. Her centre of gravity was in truth transferred to Weimar and soon she had set up a special room for Weimar treasures — presents from the Duchess, silhouettes, busts, and the like. Yet she was chronically hungry to hear of the doings there. "If my little ship is to travel at all," she says, "its sails must be swelled by a wind from Weimar; the rest of the world is a vale of tears to me and I never trouble my head about it. Even the postman knows that, for when he has a letter from Weimar to give me he pulls the bell nearly out, while for others he only goes 'ping-ping.' And I've given him a double New Year's tip for it, too, because he understands Frau Aja's inmost thoughts so well."

In the spring of 1776, on the strength of the enthusiasm felt by the poet Wieland for Goethe and all that touched his life — he called him "the greatest, best and most glorious human being God ever created" — another correspondent was added to Frau Aja's already long list. Wieland had conceived an ardent desire to know her just from reading her letters, and in December, 1777, he and two comrades, who were also friends of Goethe, came to pass four blissful days at "Casa Santa," as he had

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

already christened the Frankfort home, dining there daily and being taken almost literally into the bosom of the family. Six weeks later one of these friends wrote back to their hostess: "Here in Weimar I can't get used either to the air or to the people; and quite naturally, too, for those days I spent with you were, I say it without any hesitation, the happiest of my whole life. It is impossible to describe to you my feelings as I sat at your round table, next to Goethe's dear parents, and with Wieland and Merck — such a band of pure souls. . . . The Herr Rath used to sit there quite silent, but I think inwardly pleased (though he didn't manage to express it), and just said once or twice, 'Oh, that was good, that was very good.' But you sat opposite to me in all your glory, and however much you might be interested in the conversation, nothing else that went on in the room escaped you." In a letter to Lavater Frau Aja gives a sprightly account of this same visit: "Wieland was with us this winter together with friend Merck. Oh what a delightful period was that once more. You would not understand it so for among you there are still a few congenial people; but among us . . . I am only afraid of rusting out; where one is obliged to associate with none but commonplace people there is 1000 to 1 to be wagered that if one does not give heed one

FRAU AJA

becomes commonplace too. . . . Brother Wolf is well, thank God; is very happy in his little Garden-House, and for the birthday of the reigning Duchess has composed a drama of which the monodrama *Proserpina* forms a portion. He sent it to us to read."

The glowing descriptions of Frau Aja given at Court by Wieland, Kranz and Merck soon brought it about that no less a personage than the Dowager Duchess herself announced her intention of visiting "Casa Santa." Frederick the Great had said of this mother of Goethe's young Duke that "her talents for ruling were too large for so narrow a kingdom." Certainly she possessed considerable learning and, for a duchess, very unconventional views; she from the first took Goethe's part in the criticisms made of him in high Weimar circles because he was a mere *bourgeois*. She had not the slightest objection, therefore, to being the guest of a Frau Rath who had borne such a son. In fact she eagerly embraced the opportunity offered by a journey to the Rhine, in the summer of 1778, to stop off at Frankfort and enter into the closest personal relations with the poet's mother. She had with her on this occasion her lively lady-in-waiting, Fräulein von Göchhausen, who, though little and crooked, was endowed with rare wit and charm. (The

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Duke and Goethe were said to be very fond of the Fräulein in spite of the fact that active hostilities were always going on between them in the warfare of fun and practical jokes.) To Frau Aja she sent many lively letters, after the Frankfort visit, which particularly delighted the doting mother-heart. One such, written in October, 1778, from Ettersburg, runs:

"Heartily beloved Frau Aja, I always rejoice when I sit down to write to you; . . . This time I will tell you of the last theatrical merry-making which took place here at the ducal residence at Ettersburg. I shall inflict every kind of burning torment on Dr. Wolf and Philip, if I hear that they have already written you of the whole affair for I begged these children of men to leave me, for once, this pleasure.

"Therefore, the 20th October of this, under God, passing year, it occurred that the *Médecin malgré lui*, translated by Einsiedel, and the *Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern* were performed in the newly-built Ettersburg theatre, to the great delight of all spectators high and low. For three weeks beforehand there was no end of noise and hammering and our princess [Duchess Anna Amalia], Dr. Wolf, Kraus, etc., were constantly tumbling over each other in their effort and assiduity. . . . Dr. Wolf played

FRAU AJA

all his parts beyond all measure excellently and well; had also taken great care to rig himself out, especially for the rôle of the Mountebank. Oh could wishes have conjured you here to us, just for those few hours! Following the play a great banquet was given, after which the persons of rank took leave in a body (except our Duchess), but for us pack of players there was arranged a grand ball which lasted till the clear bright morning, and all was merriment and good nature. To say also something of myself, I cannot help mentioning, with all modesty, that I played the noble governess in the puppet-show very nicely."

The Duchess was very anxious that the Frau Aja should make them all a visit and, soon after her stay at Frankfort, she began to make arrangements by which this holiday plan for Goethe's mother might become a fact. "Do come next spring, dear mother," she wrote from Ettersburg, November 4, 1778, "and pray do not regard the matter as so difficult. Friend Wolf is anxious for it just as I am and we have talked a great deal about it. We will provide the old father during the time with all sorts of entertainment. Kranz shall come and shall play to him on the violin in a model style. . . . You cannot think how much I rejoice in the thought of it."

But Frau Aja never saw her son against the back-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ground of royalty. One thing and then another delayed her projected visit until, at last, it seemed to be quite settled that Weimar should come to her instead of her going to it. Goethe's mercurial friend, Merck, went often and, thanks to him, we have a few vivid glimpses of life in Casa Santa. To Wieland, who had formerly been there with him, he wrote, November 21, 1778, "Frau Aja and I talked over together everything that occurred to us last year in this room. Yesterday all the maidens who last year, on your account, came so often to the house, were again together, and Madame Brentano played again the same jig on the harpsichord." . . . On the back of this letter Merck's hostess wrote three days later, "Merck has been with us, and now that he has gone, I look about his room and put things in order, a work very necessary where poets have been, as you can sufficiently see from the fact that this poor letter would have surely lain here and never reached its destination had Frau Aja less insight into poets' ways. But she is, thank God, not yet out of practice, although Herr Wolfgang Goethe, for three years now, no longer gladdens the house but lets his light shine in Weimar."

It was one of Frau Aja's boasts that she liked nearly everybody. Two striking exceptions, however, we find to this. One visitor whom she did not

FRAU AJA

like was Madame de Staël and the other Madame La Roche. When the former sought her out in her peaceful Frankfort home she felt really aggrieved and wrote to Goethe: "She weighed upon me as if I had a millstone about my neck. I went out of her way everywhere, refused all companies where she was and breathed more freely when she was gone. What does the woman want with me? I have never in my life written even an A B C book, and my good genius will in the future also guard me from it." Her other *bête noir* was Sophia La Roche, a literary lady. Goethe favourably reviewed one of the La Roche novels about the time that his *Werther* appeared; and for her daughter, Maximiliane, he had had a *tendresse*, as we know. Bettina, who was the child of Maximiliane and her Italian-born husband, came to be a great chum of Goethe's mother. But for the blue-stocking grandmother of Bettina nobody could make Frau Aja have any feeling except scorn. In one letter to her "dearest princess," written at the time of the great spring fair of 1779, she pulls herself up, after a somewhat ribald quotation from Goethe's own description of a similar festivity, by saying, "But keep a civil tongue in your head, Frau Aja. Madame La Roche is here. If Dr. Wolf could only see the son-in-law that the authoress of *Sternheim* is going to hang around her second daughter's neck,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

he would gnash his teeth and swear most godlessly, in his usual praiseworthy fashion. Yesterday she introduced me to the monster — good Lord!!! If that man wanted to make me queen of the whole world, including America, I should know how to send him about his business. He looks — well, like the Devil in the seventh prayer of Luther's *Shorter Catechism*, is as stupid as a maggot, and on the top of everything else he's a *Hofrath*. May I be an oyster if I can see what it all means. A woman like the La Roche, with brains decidedly above the average, passably rich, and a person of some rank and importance, too, setting to work like this to make her daughter miserable. And then writing *Sternheims* and those precious *Letters from a Female*, too. In short, my head is going round like a mill-wheel. I hope your highness will forgive me for going on in this way, but I have just had it all before my very eyes and the tears of that poor dear Louise are more than I can stand."

For Frau Aja was very fond of young girls. One of the joys of her life in these days was the Saturday circle of maidens who were wont to meet at her home for sewing, gossip and tea. In sending some "little biscuits," April 11, 1779, to her "most serene princess" she alludes to the appetite for goodies possessed by these same Saturday maidens. The

FRAU AJA

Duchess Amalia's acknowledgment of the "biscuits" gives us the other side of this unique friendship, which, save for Frau Aja's extreme good sense, must have been quite impossible in the Germany of the eighteenth century.

"WEIMAR, the 21st April, '79.

"DEAR, BEST MOTHER: I am in possession of two of your best letters and two boxes of biscuits which came with them, for which I send you many thanks. The intelligence you communicate to me in regard to the marriage of La Roche's youngest daughter is so amazing that the senses stand still. I sent your letter to Dr. Wolf; but as court life has made him very well behaved, he did not gnash his teeth and still less swear, but shrugged his shoulders over the lamentable adventure. We are all curious to know the name of the man whose victim the poor Louise is to become. In this case the proverb speaks truly: 'Do as I say, not as I do;' for her [Frau La Roche's] emotions, as set down in black and white, appear to be far distant from her heart." . . .

Having made a close friend of the dowager duchess it but remained for Frau Aja to entertain her son, the Duke, who had done so much to bring them all honour and glory. Happy, indeed, must she have

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

been when the following letter came to her in August, 1779, from Goethe: "My desire to see you once more has up to this time been held in check by the circumstances which made my presence here more or less necessary. But now an opportunity may present itself in regard to which, however, I must, above all, ask for the strictest secrecy. The Duke has a fancy to enjoy the beautiful autumn on the Rhine. He wishes that I should go with him, and Chamberlain von Wedel, and that we should alight at your house; but in order to avoid the friends at the Fair, remain a few days only and then continue on by water. Afterward he proposes that we should return and take up our abode with you, so as from thence to visit the neighbourhood. Whether you take this prosaically or poetically, it is really the dot on the *i* of your whole past life, and for the first time I return to my home well and happy, and with all possible honour. But as I should like, since the wine has turned out so well on the mountains of Samaria, that there should be piping also, I will hope for nothing less than that you and my father should have open and feeling hearts to receive us, and to thank God who in such manner lets you see your son again in his thirtieth year. As I have withstood all temptations to slip away from here and to surprise you, I wish to enjoy this journey fully to

FRAU AJA

my heart's content. The impossible I do not expect. God has not willed that my father should enjoy ¹ the fruits so ardently longed for which are now ripe. He has taken his appetite from him and so it must be. I will gladly ask nothing from that quarter but whatever demeanour the humour of the moment may suggest to him.

"But you I would see right joyous and would wish you such a good day as you have never yet known. I have everything that a man can desire, a life in which I daily educate myself and daily grow, and I come this time, well, without passion, without perplexity, without striving, but like one beloved of God who has passed the half of his days and hopes out of past sorrow much good for the future; and has also proved his heart for future sorrow. If I find you happy I shall return with joy to the labour and toil of the day which awaits me. Answer me immediately in full. We come at all events in the middle of September; the details you shall know down to the smallest particular, as soon as I have a reply to this. But inviolable secrecy, for the present, towards my father, Merck, etc. Our arrival must yet be a surprise to all; I depend upon this. No one here yet suspects anything of it. The ninth August, 1779. G."

¹ Rath Goethe's mind had somewhat failed.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Frau Aja's answer was prompt and so full of happiness that Goethe immediately wrote, "Such a reply I wished from you, dear mother. I hope it will all prove very pleasant and delightful. So, then, more particular information of our coming. We are to arrive about the middle of September and remain with you a few days very quietly. For, as the Duke does not wish to see his aunts and cousins, who will be at the Fair, we shall go right on and float down the Main and Rhine. When we have completed our tour we shall come back and take up *in forma* our quarters with you. I shall then call to mind all my friends and acquaintances, and the Duke will go to Darmstadt and visit a few of the nobility in that neighbourhood. Our quarters will be arranged as follows: For the Duke a bed will be made in the little room, and the organ, if it still stands there, moved out. The large room remains for visitors and as an entrance to his apartments. He sleeps on a clean sack of straw over which is spread a fine linen sheet under a light coverlet. The chimney-room will be prepared for his servant, a mattress-bed placed in it. For Herr von Wedel the back gray room will be made ready, also a mattress-bed, etc. For me, above, in my old rooms, also, a sack of straw, etc., as for the Duke.

"As to eating, you will prepare dinner for four,

FRAU AJA

no more, no less, no cookery but your domestic *chefs d'œuvres*, in the best manner; whatever fruit you can procure mornings will be well. It reduces itself, therefore, to this, that the first time we come we will surprise everyone, and a few days will pass by before we are noticed; in fair-time this is easy. Take all the lustres out of the Duke's rooms. They would look ridiculous to him. The wall-candlesticks you can leave. In other respects everything neat as usual and the less ceremony apparent the better. It must seem as if we had thus lived with you for ten years. For servants provide one or two beds up under the roof where our people are. Your silver place out for the Duke's use, handbasin, candlesticks, etc. He drinks no coffee or anything of the kind. . . ."

For an account of the ecstatic moment of the guests' arrival we cannot do better than turn to a letter which the happy hostess sent to the Duchess-mother after they had gone. "The 18th of September was a great day, the day on which the old father and Frau Aja could not envy the gods, either their dwelling on high Olympus, or their nectar and ambrosia, or their vocal or instrumental music, but were so happy, so supremely happy, that I don't think any mortal could ever have tasted any greater or purer pleasure than we two happy parents on that

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

day of rejoicing. Well, his Highness, our best and most gracious Prince, in order to give us a real surprise got down a little way short of the house, so that they came to the door without making any noise at all, rang the bell and marched into the Blue Room. Now your Highness must just picture to yourself Frau Aja sitting at the round table — suddenly the door opens and before she can turn round her Hätschelshans¹ has fallen on her neck, the Duke standing a few paces apart watching her maternal joy, till at last Frau Aja runs up intoxicated to the best of Princes, half crying and half laughing, and not knowing in the least what she's doing. Then his introduction to the father was altogether beyond description. I was quite afraid the old man would die on the spot, and at this very moment of writing, when his Highness is already far away, he has scarcely recovered his senses, and Frau Aja is no better off."

Five rapturous days they spent there together, days of which Madame La Roche, who, to do her justice, appears to have been a well-meaning person, records that "the amazement of everybody — nobles, merchants and landlords — is certainly very great. . . . But I grant Frau Aja with all my heart the inward satisfaction which this visit must give

¹ The Frau Rath's pet name for Goethe.

FRAU AJA

her. . . . There is no mother living who so fully deserves these joys as she." That there was anxiety as well as pleasure in this entertainment of a reigning Duke and his retinue goes without saying, for the old Rath had an attack of his well-known closeness and it was probably a very welcome gift¹ of money which Karl August sent Frau Aja, unknown either to her husband or her son, promptly upon his return to Weimar.

And then *for more than twelve years* Goethe did not again revisit his native city or set eyes on his sweet mother. Not even when his father died did he make the journey to Frankfort, though his presence there would certainly have greatly lessened the burden of business which devolved upon his mother by the death of her aged husband. The great man was, in fact, becoming more and more closely chained to Weimar, partly, no doubt, by the claims of public business, but also, we may as well admit, by the fascinations of Frau von Stein, who, for good or ill, was for ten years the dominant influence of his life. Whatever may be the truth about their relation it is

¹ The remittance came by way of Merck and with it went these characteristic instructions: "I send herewith what I wish Frau Aja to have. She must accept it on the following terms: first; it is not a present; she did much for me in saving me from having to pay dear for bad accommodation at the 'Red House' [the hotel in the Zeil]; secondly, the old man is to know nothing of our little arrangement; thirdly, Goethe is on no account to hear of it."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

perfectly clear that his passion for her absorbed his powers both of mind and heart to an ever-larger extent and that no one suffered more from this absorption than his mother. Goethe himself said in a letter written to Lavater: "She has gradually taken the place of mother, sister and sweetheart to me; and a bond has been forged like the bonds of nature." And to the lady herself he wrote, in June, 1784, when at Eisenach on business, "They tell me I could be in Frankfort in thirty-one hours, and yet I cannot entertain the most fleeting idea of going thither. You have so drawn my nature to you that I have nothing left for my other natural duties."

One benefit, however, Frau Aja did derive from this strange attachment and that was the correspondence with Frau von Stein's little son, Fritz, reference to which has already been made. The lad had been almost adopted by Goethe, in the early part of 1783, and in the following year he began to be the dear friend of his patron's mother also. Presents between them were constantly exchanged, and after he had sent her his silhouette she returned the compliment, adding for good measure the best description of her personal appearance that we may anywhere find: "I am in person rather stout and rather corpulent; have brown eyes and hair, and venture to think that I could well

FRAU AJA

personate the mother of Prince Hamlet. Many persons maintain that no one could fail to see that Goethe is my son."

This allusion to "Hamlet" is characteristic, for Frau Aja was a great lover of the play, and when Fritz went to visit her, as he soon did, they saw Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* together. She at once nicknamed her little friend Cherubino, and henceforth, in their letters, this name crops up from time to time. The woman of fifty-four and the lad of twelve also enjoyed together the balloon ascensions which were the feature of that fair-time. Frankfort was greatly excited over Blanchard,¹ and when he returned to the city, after his ascension of October 3, 1785, he was received with the wildest enthusiasm. His carriage was drawn by men to the theatre and there he was led from box to box amid universal congratulations. On the stage his bust was crowned in a Temple of Fame while Graces and Loves advanced, singing couplets in his praise, to place the laurel upon his brow. He was also presented with gold snuff boxes, watches, medals and money, while twelve German princes and princesses, who chanced to be at Frankfort, subscribed for a balloon capable of carrying fifty persons, to be ready for the next coronation. In all this Fritz shared as an onlooker.

¹ Cf. *Old Boston Days and Ways*, p. 299 et seq.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

No wonder he regarded Frankfort as an ideal place of residence.

Moreover, was he not there stuffed to the eyebrows with goodies? "I owe you thanks," he writes Frau Aja quaintly in his bread-and-butter letter, "for all the kindness you have lavished upon me. . . . Many people think I have grown stout. I can well believe it, for you fed me so well, better than the Countess did Cherubino."

Goethe was very grateful to his mother for giving Fritz a happy holiday and he thanked her warmly for "this, done wholly out of love for me. You will find he is a charming child," he adds, "and his narrations are now giving me great pleasure. If one, after the manner of Swedenborgian spirits, wishes to look through the eyes of others, one would do best to use children's eyes for that purpose." He himself found a deepened pleasure in Fritz's society now that the lad had learned from his mother "the philosophy of a cheerful life. Thou wilt be astonished to see how much he is improved in every respect," the poet tells Frau von Stein in his letter of October 6, 1785.

For the next three years the correspondence between Fritz and his Frankfort friend goes gaily on, and through it we obtain some charming glimpses of Frau Aja's everyday life. "Here in my little house-

FRAU AJA

hold things are much as when you saw them," one letter runs, "only as the sun chooses to stay in bed longer, I do, too, and don't get out of my feathers till half past eight; nor do I see in the least why I should upset myself, for peace, peace, that is my real delight, and as God grants it to me, I enjoy it with a thankful heart. On Sundays I go to dinner with Frau Stock, . . . and in the evening three or four friends come to play quadrille or l'ombre, at which we have the greatest fun. On other days God always vouchsafes me something; and so one trudges along through the world, enjoying the little pleasures and not asking for big ones." Some of these "little pleasures" are more specifically described in other letters as reading, playing the piano, lace-making¹ and the theatre. These "hobby-horses," Frau Aja says, carry her cheerfully through the lonely days.

In the autumn of 1786 Goethe left Carlsbad, where he had been passing a portion of the summer, for Italy. The journey was kept a profound secret from everybody except the Duke, his mother's first knowledge of it coming in the following letter:

¹ The embroidery pillow of the Frau Rath and the very piano upon which she and Bettina together made music are among the intimate relics now displayed in the fascinating Goethe house at Frankfort. Vividly interesting, also, to the Goethe pilgrim, are the large maps here shown by means of which the Herr Rath kindled in his son a yearning enthusiasm for Italy.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

“ ROME, the 4th Nov., '86.

“ First of all I must tell you, dear mother, that I have arrived here safe and sound. My journey, which I entered upon in absolute secrecy, has given me great pleasure. I have come through Bavaria, Tyrol, by Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Venice, Ferrara, Bologna and Florence, quite alone and unknown, and here also I preserve a kind of incognito.

“ What happiness I felt that so many of my life's dreams and wishes are being fulfilled, and that I now see in actual nature the objects which, from my childhood, I have seen in engravings, and of which I heard my father so often speak — this I cannot express to you.

“ All these things, it is true, I see rather late, yet with all the more benefit and a great deal in a short time.

“ How long I shall stay I do not yet know; it will depend upon how matters are at home. In any case I shall return through Switzerland and pay you a visit; then we will enjoy ourselves together; but this must remain a secret between us.

“ To-day I have not time to say much; I only wished you should speedily share in my joy. I shall come back as a new man and live to greater enjoyment for myself and my friends. . . . Write to me soon at length how you are, and also whatever news

FRAU AJA

there may be; in a foreign country everything is interesting that concerns friends and dear ones. Also, for my guidance, tell me when this letter reached you. Farewell and keep me in love. G."

Characteristically, her reply congratulates him on having realized one of the hopes of his life and says not a word about any anxiety she may have felt during the two months which elapsed before she learned of his whereabouts. "An apparition from the other world," she writes, "could not have caused me more astonishment than thy letter from Rome. I could have shouted for joy that the wish which lay in your heart from earliest youth has now been fulfilled. A man like thee, with thy knowledge, with thy great appreciation of all that is good, great, beautiful, — one with such an eagle eye a journey like this must make happy and fortunate for the rest of his life, and not thee only but all who have the good fortune to live within the sphere of thy activity. The words of the blessed Klettenberg will remain ever in my memory, 'When thy Wolfgang goes to Mainz he brings back more knowledge than others returning from Paris or London.' But I would have liked to see thee at thy first sight of St. Peter's! However, thou hast promised to visit me on the return journey, and then thou must describe me everything to a hair. . . . My life flows quietly on,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

like a clear brook. Disquiet and commotion were never agreeable to me and I thank Providence for my [calm] days. To thousands such a life would seem monotonous, but not to me; the quieter my body is the more active in me are my thinking powers. Thus I can pass a whole live-long day entirely alone, wonder that it is evening and be as happy as a goddess, and one needs not in this world more than to be happy and contented. The news from thy old acquaintances is that Papa La Roche is no longer at Speyer, but has bought himself a house in Offenbach, and proposes there to end his days. The rest of thy friends are all still what they were; not one has made such giant strides as thou. . . . When thou comest here all these people must be invited and handsomely entertained — game, roasts, poultry, like the sands of the sea: it shall truly be splendid.

“ Dear son, an humble doubt just occurs to me as to whether this letter may come into thy hands. I do not know where thou art living in Rome, thou art half *in conito* (as thou writest). We will hope for the best, but before thou comest let something be heard from thee, otherwise I should be thinking every post-chaise brought me my sole beloved one, and hope disappointed is very disagreeable to me. Farewell, dear one, and think often of thy faithful mother,

“ ELIZABETH GOETHE.”

FRAU AJA

For over a year this "faithful mother" lived in eager anticipation of the visit which she had been promised, dwelling constantly in her mind upon the glorious day of her son's arrival and planning a hundred different ways of serving the fatted calf which was then to be killed in his honour. Of his movements and experiences in Italy she was kept informed through the Journal-letters to Frau von Stein, which, at Goethe's request, were forwarded to her. Thus it was that, on January 9, 1787, she found herself writing the following letter to the woman whom Goethe had been worshipping for ten years:

"HIGH AND NOBLE LADY, EXCELLENT FRIEND:
How many thanks I owe you for the communication of the so very interesting letters. I rejoice that my son's longing to see Rome has been fulfilled. It was, from his youth up, his daily thought, his nightly dream. The happiness which he must feel and enjoy in seeing the masterpieces of the old world I can fancy to the life and I rejoice in his joy. . . . I commend myself and my son most heartily to your and your husband's continued love and friendship, and remain with greatest respect, high and noble lady,

"Your most obedient servant and friend,

"E. GOETHE."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Evidently Goethe's mother, though she had no great warmth of feeling for Frau von Stein, was resolved to show her all possible outward respect.

After all the hero came not! He appears to have changed his mind about the visit to Frankfort early in March, 1788, for in a letter sent to the Duke on March 17 of that year we find the sentence: "I have already undeceived my mother about seeing me on my way home, and have consoled her with the hope of some other occasion." Four years more were to pass away before she actually did see him. Then, on the journey to Mainz made necessary by the wars, he stopped at Frankfort both going and coming. These visits made his mother very happy, — so happy that they go far to redeem in the eyes of the candid reader what has previously seemed very like neglect of Frau Aja on the part of her distinguished son. He now showed himself to be deeply concerned for his mother's comfort and advised her to try to sell the old house, through which much expense was imposed upon her by means of taxings and billetings, and to move to a lodging which would be more easily managed. He pressed her, too, to come to Weimar in case the war should make life in Frankfort too uncomfortable for her. But Frau Aja had no mind to leave her native city and, with



FRAU AJA.

After the painting now in the Museum of the Goethe House at
Frankfort.



ROSS MARKET, FRANKFORT.

The second house from the left was the later home of Goethe's mother.

FRAU AJA

her usual optimism, she pooh-poohed the suggestion of actual danger to herself.

When everybody else was worried half to death, indeed, over the warlike aspect of things, we find her writing, "All this muddle and confusion hasn't worried me at all, thank God; I sleep my eight hours through every night, eat and drink as much as I want, and which is the best part of it, am in excellent health. They didn't send me the wounded lieutenant after all, but instead of him a Prussian major with four of his men; and I can tell you they think they're in Paradise. But the amount of food they get through! They were so starved out that they went to one's heart. So yesterday I sent them a dish of roast pork for their dinner, and you can imagine what a royal feast they had."

Yet she did give her consent to moving from the old home and, in 1795, this change was actually accomplished, the historic "Goethe-haus"¹ being purchased for 22,000 florins by a young wine-merchant who was attracted to it mainly because of the excellent cellar in which Frau Aja had been wont to store those precious wines affectionately characterized in her letters as "old gentlemen." The large house thus advantageously disposed of she moved to a delightful apartment overlooking the

¹ It is now a show-place and Goethe museum, however.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Ross markt, Frankfort's chief open space, and there she for some months had the "time of her life" listening to the playing of bands, watching the drilling of recruits and sharing eagerly in all the colour and movement incidental to life in a town full of soldiers. Even she, however, found that being bombarded was not a pleasant experience. Of the three days in July, 1796, when the Austrians attempted to hold the city against the French she wrote to her son: "The idea of the French marching into the town hadn't frightened me at all, for I was firmly convinced they wouldn't plunder; so why should I trouble to pack? I left everything as it was and kept quite calm, for no one dreamt that the Austrians would hold the place; and as the sequel showed it *was* the purest madness. But as they decided to all the same, things began to look serious. . . .

"The Austrian Commandant was staying just opposite to me, so I could watch all the hullabaloo — the French with their eyes bound up, our burgo-master, every one in terror of what was going to happen next. On the 12th, towards evening, the bombardment began; and we all went down to our landlord's room on the ground floor. When it slackened a little I went up to bed, but towards two in the morning it began again and up we had to get.

FRAU AJA

Now at last I began to pack, not for fear of the French, but for fear of fire, and in a few hours everything was down in the cellar, all except the iron chest, which was too heavy for us. . . . Up to this point I was still serene, but now such fearful news began to come in, how this person and that (and people I knew too) had been hit, one struck dead with a shell, one having his arm and another his foot shot away from his body, that at last I began to be frightened and made up my mind to get away, though not very far, only just so as to escape the bombardment. But now I found that no vehicle was to be had for love nor money, till at last I heard that a family near me was going to drive to Offenbach. I sent to ask if they would take me with them and they very politely said they would. Well, I am not one of the timid souls, but this awful night that I was able to pass quietly at Offenbach with Mama La Roche might perhaps have cost me my life, or at least my health here in Frankfort."

Even now, however, Goethe appears not to have been too greatly disturbed by the perils through which his mother had passed. Certainly he wrote of it quite calmly in his diary. And he made no further move to bring her to Weimar. One reason, very likely, why he did not insist upon his mother's coming to live with him was because Christiane had

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

now for seven years been the virtual if not the actual mistress of his house. Not that Frau Aja's attitude towards this *liaison* was one of stern disapproval. She seems to have really liked Christiane and to have regretted Goethe's illicit relation only because she could not boast to her friends of the grandchildren it brought her. For herself, she treated Christiane as a daughter and always wrote affectionately to her. Temperamentally, the two had much in common, and Frau Aja made no effort to conceal her delight that, instead of a high-born Lili or a marble-hearted Stein, her beloved son had now taken to his heart a young and joyous mädchen who could make him a happy father. Moreover, to her mind, Goethe was a superior being who could do no wrong. Her admiration for him actually verges on awe sometimes. See, for instance, a letter she sent him under date of December 11, 1799:

"DEAR SON: Since the return of Mama La Roche I really feel for the first time how thou, out of love for me, hast made shift with my little dwelling. Ah, what a splendid description she has given me and all the friends of thy house and thy whole establishment, the delicious dinner thou gavest her, the superb green satin room, the magnificent curtain, the picture that was behind it. *Summa summarum*,

FRAU AJA

she entertained me an entire day with it. What a day that was to me thou canst imagine. God keep and bless thee, and long mayest thou live on earth; and thus will it be, for mothers' blessings build houses for the children. Amen."

One very happy time that Frau Aja soon enjoyed was during a visit made to his grandmother by August Goethe, who had now grown to be a handsome lad of fifteen. Goethe's acknowledgment of her kindness on this occasion is very charming, for he was deeply devoted to his young son. "I hope the recollection of his presence gives you part of the pleasure which his narration of it now procures for us," he wrote. "We are thereby vividly brought back to you and my old friends. Heartily thank all who so kindly received him. This first essay to look out into the world has succeeded so well with him that I have good hopes for his future. His youth has been a fortunate one, and I wish that he may more gaily and joyously pass over into a more serious period of life. His description of your continuous good health gives us the greatest pleasure. He has often to repeat it. I myself, with more exercise in this better weather, am very well. We all send our fairest, best and most grateful greetings. G.

"W., May 6, 1805."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Less than six months after the above was written Goethe married Christiane. When young August next visited his grandmother, therefore, she could show him to her heart's content and in high circles, too. No more delightful anecdote has come down to us than the one Eckermann tells of young Goethe's recollections, when a man grown, of his second visit to his grandmother. They were invited to dine at the palace, and the Prince, as a mark of particular politeness, it seems, had come to meet the Frau Rath on the stairs; but as he wore his usual clerical costume she took him for an abbé and paid him no particular respect. Even when first seated at his side by the table she did not put on her most friendly face. In the course of the conversation, however, she gradually perceived from the deportment of the rest of the guests that he was the Primate. The Prince then drank her health and that of her son, whereupon she rose and in her turn proposed the health of his Highness.

The old lady and her grandson went to the play every evening during this visit. Although she was now seventy-seven she still possessed a "Frohnatur" and drained to the dregs every cup of pleasure which came her way. Even the troubles attendant upon old age could not permanently depress her. Falk relates that she said to a friend who had come to

FRAU AJA

inquire about her health, "Thank God, I am once more contented with myself, and can endure myself for a few weeks longer. Till now I have been quite intolerable, and have striven against God like a little child that never knows what it needs. But yesterday I could stand myself no longer, so I gave myself a good scolding and said, 'Ay, art thou not ashamed of thyself, old Rāthin. Thou hast had good days enough and Wolfgang besides, and now when the evil days come, thou shouldst make the best of them, and not pull such a wry face. What does it mean that thou art so impatient and naughty when the blessed God lays a cross on thee? Dost thou want then to walk upon roses forever, and art past the goal, over seventy years old?' Look you, this is what I said to myself, and directly there set in an improvement, and I grew better because I was no longer so naughty."

She died September 13, 1808, meeting this greatest experience of all not only with serenity but with gaiety. Her last resting-place is in the very heart of the Frankfort she so loved, and many visitors every year seek out the stone marked "Der Grab der Frau Rath Goethe" to pay tribute to this very lovely woman who was the mother of Germany's greatest poet.

CHAPTER X

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

FOR years Italy had been the dream of Goethe's life. As a lad his imagination had been fed by his father's enthusiastic memories of the place and, twice since reaching manhood, he had himself been on the very point of journeying thither, only to find that he was not yet to have the great happiness of seeing Rome. His yearnings towards the "*Land wo die Citronen blühen*" had long been as poignant and deep-seated as Mignon's. For some time previous to this journey he had been unable to look at engravings of Italian scenery, unable so much as to open a Latin book because of his overwhelming desire for the South. The haunting verse in which all this is so exquisitely expressed gives us, even in limping English, the colour of his emotion:

" Know'st thou the land where the pale citron bloometh,
And the gold orange through thick leafage glows?
Where gentle zephyrs from the blue sky ripple
While laurel boughs enrich the fragrant groves?
Know'st thou it well? Oh, that with *thee*,
Thither I might, my best-beloved, flee! "

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

Long after the joyous experiences of Italy had become mere memories Goethe said one day to Eckermann, apropos of a certain professor who had written and spoken with tremendous enthusiasm of Italy, "I cannot blame him; I well know what I experienced myself. Indeed, I may say that only in Rome have I felt what it really is to be a man. To this elevation, this happiness of feeling, I have never since arisen; indeed, compared with my situation at Rome, I have never since felt real gladness."

For the reflection of this gladness we must, however, look to the *Roman Elegies* rather than to the *Italian Journey*. The prose fruitage of the months in Italy are disappointing, though the pages devoted to Goethe's Naples visit offer a brilliant example of what he could have done with the country as a whole had he been so minded. No one before or since has succeeded in rendering so adequately the *anima* of Naples, with all its natural beauty, its frank sensuousness, its colour, its disorder, its squalor, its tinsel, and above all its pagan joy in life, love, and the out-of-doors. But this brilliant portion of the *Italian Journey* is at the book's close, and the earlier pages by no means "measure up."

Lewes is filled with wonder that Venice, where Goethe stayed through three golden autumn weeks

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

and where he, for the first time, saw the sea, did not inspire him to more wonderful bursts of description. But the fact is that Goethe could not really yield himself up to full enjoyment of Italy until he had reached Rome. Pleasant as he found it to observe, in passing, Padua, Verona, Florence and Perugia, he felt within himself the urgent necessity of getting on to Rome with the least possible delay. Consequently it is not until he finds himself in Rome, at the end of October, 1786, that we see perfect happiness exuding from every line of every letter! Just before his arrival he had written to Charlotte, "Let us have no other thought than to spend the close of life together." But hardly has he entered the Eternal City when her hold on him is loosened because of the influences which three other women, each in her own way, came to exert upon him.

Goethe's chief housemate in Rome was Tischbein, the painter, a man of about his own age, to whom he had already been of considerable service and who was indeed glad to welcome to his lodgings on the Corso, near the Pincian Hill, the brilliant young poet now masquerading as a German merchant. But even if Goethe had not lived with Tischbein in the Eternal City, the names of the two artists would be linked together with that of Rome by virtue of the former's splendid painting "Goethe Outside Rome,"

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

in which the poet is shown, clad in a great white mantle, a large soft hat on his head, reclining on an overturned Egyptian obelisk, a broken relievo before him, and behind him the capital of a Roman pillar. In the poet's glance, wandering over the Campagna, we read reflection upon the perishable nature of all earthly splendour.

It was through Tischbein that Goethe came to know Angelica Kauffman, a woman who, in temperament and experience, was in so many ways his close kin that one likes to speculate on what might have come of their relationship if only Angelica had been free. Six years before Goethe came into her life, however, she had married the painter, Antonio Zucchi, — a Venetian many years her senior, — in order to escape from the loneliness which was beginning to shut down upon her. She did not even pretend love for Zucchi; her romance and its tragic aftermath had left her heart too sore for this.

Born at Bregenz, October 30, 1741, — the daughter of a simple-minded church-decorator who occasionally aspired to portrait-painting, — she had already by 1763, when she left her beloved Rome for London, made a great success of her work and won many people of influence as her friends. One of these it was Lady Wentworth, wife of the English

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Resident at Venice, who took her off to the London where so much of adulation and of misery were to be hers. Frances A. Gerard, who has written a most delightful *Life* of Angelica, points out that the two favourite amusements amongst the English aristocracy of this period were "The Grand Tour" and "Patronage." Angelica got her full share of the latter, for she was precipitated, in June, 1766, into the midst of an exceptionally brilliant London season, and from the vantage-ground of Lady Wentworth's home in Berkeley Square, was soon enjoying opportunities such as no woman had ever had before to paint the portraits of the idle great. The men particularly liked to sit to this charming young artist, whom Miss Thackeray alluringly describes in her novel *Miss Angel* as about twenty-six years of age, with a face peculiar, sprightly, tender, a little obstinate, the eyes charming and intelligent, the features broadly marked. "There is something at once homely and dignified," she continues, — with Sir Joshua Reynolds' famous portrait of Angelica in mind, — "in the little head charmingly set upon its frame, a few pearls mixed with the heavy loops of hair, and two great curls falling down upon the shoulders, while the slim figure is draped in light folds fastened by jewelled bands, such as those which people then wore."



GOETHE OUTSIDE ROME.
After the painting by Tischbein.



ANGELICA KAUFFMAN.
From the portrait by herself now in the
Alte Pinakothek Museum, Munich.



CHRISTIANE.

From a pencil drawing by Goethe. See p. 291.



ANGELICA KAUFFMAN.

From the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

Since in addition to so much beauty Angelica had a sprightly wit, charm, and musical accomplishments, it is small wonder that she took London by storm. Reynolds is believed to have been in love with her, but there is no evidence that, on either side, the attachment was one which seriously involved the heart. Very likely she would have married the famous and fascinating Sir Joshua if he had asked her to, but since he did not ask her — his heart having grown callous, as he himself says, from too much contact with beauty, — she probably soon learned to take the gallantry of the man for just what it was worth and to be grateful for the friendliness of the artist whose rival she had suddenly become. At any rate, she painted his portrait soon after he had painted hers, and both seemed not to care that the tongues of gossips wagged joyously as a result.

The marriage which did fall to her lot during those early years of her career in England was, indeed, but a pitiful travesty. A dashing, attractive fellow who claimed to be the Count Frederick de Horn (and was actually so regarded in the best London society) persuaded her to go through a nuptial ceremony with him. Only when it was too late did she learn that he was no count and she no wife, in that he had already pledged marriage vows to a woman

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

of humble station in life, — he being the real count's valet!

In the face of this catastrophe Angelica's work was of course more than ever precious to her. Into the execution of the many portrait commissions which came to her, she threw herself with almost feverish devotion, turning off with surprising rapidity at her home in Golden Square, paintings of nearly all of the nobility in that disguise of gods and goddesses then so dear to the fancy of England. All the while she continued to be much sought by men, and there was more than one chance of an advantageous marriage for her if she had only been willing to undergo the ordeal of proving that the villain who had duped her had no real claim upon her. This she steadfastly refused to do, however, and not until 1780, when the impostor died abroad, did she listen to the prayer of her aged father that she would become the wife of Antonio Zucchi and return to the sunny skies of Rome. Then at last she consented to this marriage of *convenance*, and so, after sixteen years of London, she found herself, in 1780, back in Rome, with all the worldly success she could desire at her command, but with a hungry heart — in spite of the presence of a kind and attentive husband.

Goethe, who came to be *l'ami intime* of the Zucchi household, soon after his arrival in Rome

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

wrote: " Angelica is not as happy as she deserves to be, or as her great talent merits, and with the fortune which she daily earns she is herself weary of painting for sale, but her old husband finds it profitable that she should do so. She would prefer to have more leisure to prepare her work with more care and study, and she ought to have it. They have no children and have no necessity to save, and she should have only a certain quantity of work to do every day. This, however, is not the case and never will be. She speaks very openly to me, and I have given her my opinion and advice, — and I try to cheer her up when I am with her. . . ."

He was with her a great deal about this time (early in 1787), reading *Iphigenie* aloud with such ardour that even old Zucchi, not to mention Angelica, was deeply moved. In his letter to the Frau von Stein, Goethe declares that "the tender soul of Angelica listened to the piece with incredible profoundness of sympathy," which is perhaps about as far as we might expect him to go considering that he was writing to a woman who had long adored him of another woman who was just beginning to give him love. Goethe's biographers are unusually reticent concerning his friendship with his talented countrywoman. Perhaps they feel, as I do, that his treatment of Angelica does him little credit. He should

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

not have made her care for him. She was now forty-six, a dangerous age for a woman to fall in love, and had been starved in her affections. He was thirty-eight, and in the height of his manly beauty and power. Both were artists to the finger-tips. That the presence of old Zucchi did not prevent them from feeling warm affection for each other we know in two ways,—by Goethe's remark, on leaving Rome, "I feel that I could wish to bind myself by closer ties to this fascinating woman," — and by Angelica's letters after he had gone. We are used by now to Goethe's enthusiasm over women who appealed to him, but we recognize the authentic note in such passages as the following: "I go often to Angelica, especially when I am in a thoughtful mood, and have no one to whom I can open my mind. It is now settled that I go there every Sunday; after dinner we visit the galleries. You cannot conceive what real enjoyment there is in seeing pictures with her. Her eye is so educated, her knowledge of the mechanism of art so great, her feeling for the beautiful so profound, — and she is so inconceivably modest." As for Angelica, she said of Goethe that "in art he saw better than any one else."

But it was not simply as artists that they enjoyed each other. Goethe had most profound admiration for the lovely soul of this sweet woman who had

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

suffered much. "She has something the nature of Fra Angelico," he wrote, "whose mind was full of heavenly images, which he depicted with such fidelity that it was impossible for him to give any idea of a demon. So it is with Angelica; a villain she could not, for the life of her, convey to canvas. Her works are the outcome of a lovely imagination, a pure soul; for the rest, she is mistress of her pencil, excels in colouring, which is much appreciated here."

In another of his letters home he gives an account of a party he gave in Angelica's honour. "She never goes to the theatre," he writes, "for what reason I do not inquire, but as we talked much to her of the music of Cimarosa, and she desired ardently to hear it, Bury [one of Goethe's housemates, a young artist] resolved to procure her as much satisfaction as could be got from a musical representation. He and concert-master Kranz, from Weimar, a violinist of much merit, studying now in Rome, arranged the representation. I had in upholsterers and confectioners and we had a charming concert on the loveliest summer's night. Madame Angelica, her husband, Hofrath Rieffenstein, Volpato, Jenkins, and all who have been civil to us were invited; under the windows, which were open, a crowd collected and applauded, as if at the opera, the different *morceaux*."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Sunday came to be a red-letter day in Angelica's calendar, for there was always some plan or other which brought Goethe to her then. His charming little notes making arrangements for these conferences show us that to him, also, the first day of the week soon became one to be eagerly anticipated. "I am working at a tale of enchantment," he confides, "which I hope to read you on Sunday, if I am fortunate enough to find you at home. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I know I have a general pardon. Farewell, my best friend. GOETHE." The tale of enchantment referred to is *Egmont*, and when the reading came off, "Angelica's impressionable soul was deeply touched — she has such wonderful perception and delicacy of mind." He paid her the high compliment of consulting her as to the vision seen by *Egmont* in his dream, and as Angelica had the tact to agree with his own conception of the matter, he was frankly delighted. The first copies of *Egmont* were dedicated to her by way of reward. The honour of making a design for the title-page was also hers.

To be sure her attempt in this direction was not very successful, and the same must unfortunately be said of the portrait of Goethe which she painted. "It is a very pretty fellow," the poet wrote his friends, "but it has no trace of me, and Angelica is much vexed at the failure." Very likely that critic was

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

right who hazarded the opinion that "the high estimation in which the painter held the poet interfered with the reproduction of the genius on her canvas." The allusion here is to Angelica's great admiration for Goethe as a writer, not of the feeling which she had for him as a man. But others there are who, understanding perfectly the nature of her esteem, say quite plainly that the affection between them was such that "had she been free Goethe would have made her his wife, and that a marriage with her would have given that repose to his life which was wanting in his union with the Vulpina." Perhaps. But biographers should know better than to assume that Goethe would have been glad to marry every woman with whom he fell in love. Quite the contrary!

Rome and Angelica were indeed by no means so alluring that Goethe felt disposed on their account to curtail the cultural development for which he had come to Italy. Towards the end of February, 1787, one finds him gaily travelling southwards for the purpose of visiting Naples and Sicily. Tischbein he took with him, and we thus learn that "Goethe, at sight of the wonderful scenery, was after his fashion perfectly quiet, only making, when it became too mad, great, great eyes." Goethe himself wrote of the bewitching city, "If in Rome one must study,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

here in Naples one can only live." Accordingly *he* began to live, spending hour after hour on the seashore among the fishermen, sailing o'er the moonlit waters with chosen friends, mingling with the people on the streets, and everywhere drinking in fresh delights and feeding his eager fancy with new and vivid pictures. "I pardoned all who lost their senses in Naples," he wrote (February 27, 1787, *Die Italianische Reise*), "and thought with emotion of my father, who had retained an indelible impression, especially of the objects which I to-day saw for the first time. And as it is said that one to whom a phantom has appeared never again is glad, so might it be said of my father that he could never be altogether unhappy, because he was constantly thinking himself back in Naples."

In Naples Goethe made no attempt, as he had done in Rome, to keep to his incognito and avoid meeting new people. On the contrary, he now took all the social pleasures which came his way, among them the opportunity to see intimately the old English ambassador, Sir William Hamilton, and his beautiful mistress, Emma Harte, the siren whose beauty led the noble Nelson astray. From Casterta, March 16, 1787, our poet writes, "Sir William Hamilton, who still resides here as ambassador from England, has at length, after his long love of art and long



GOETHE.

From a portrait by Angelica Kauffman, now in the Museum of the
Goethe House, Frankfort.



EMMA HAMILTON, BY ROMNEY.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

study, discovered the most perfect example of nature and of art in a beautiful young woman. She lives with him, — an English woman about twenty years old. She is very handsome and of a beautiful figure. The old knight has made for her a Greek costume which becomes her extremely. Dressed in this and letting her hair loose, and taking a couple of shawls, she exhibits every possible variety of posture, expression and look, so that at the last the spectator almost fancies it is a dream. One beholds here in perfection, in movement, in ravishing variety, all that the greatest of artists have rejoiced to be able to reproduce. Standing, kneeling, sitting, lying down, grave or sad, playful, exulting, repentant, wanton, menacing, anxious, — all mental states following rapidly one after another. With wonderful taste she suits the folding of her veil to each expression, and with the same handkerchief makes every kind of head-dress. The old knight holds the light for her and enters into the exhibition with his whole soul. He thinks that he can discern in her a resemblance to all the most famous antiques, all the beautiful profiles on the Sicilian coins, — ay, of the Apollo Belvedere itself. Thus much at any rate is certain, — the entertainment is unique. We spent two evenings on it with thorough enjoyment. To-day Tischbein is engaged in painting her." Evidently our poet

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

found the body of the lovely Emma a thing for wondering admiration; two months later, however, we find him setting it down as his opinion that this "beautiful entertainer" was without soul. He, of course, had not been privileged to see the pitiful letters (now open to any one who wishes to understand Emma) which she sent to Greville, her young lover, when he heartlessly sold her to his uncle, Sir William Hamilton,¹ in order that he might himself marry one of his own rank instead of the nursery-maid who, for five years, had been his plaything. Letters like those were never written by a woman without a soul.

It was said, a few pages back, that three women served to glorify Italy for Goethe. Chief of these, as it seems to me, was Angelica; second in importance came Faustina, a young model with whom he formed a very close, if comparatively brief, relation and to whom, in the opinion of some critics, we owe the warm sensual colouring of the *Roman Elegies*. The third woman, who also counted greatly, — though chiefly as a sentiment, — was Maddalena Riggi, a beautiful Milanese just turned twenty, whom he met while staying at Angelica's Castel Gondolfo, in October, 1787. Maddalena had blue eyes and a graceful manner, both of which tremendously at-

¹ Hamilton married her in 1791.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

tracted Goethe. But he learned that she was betrothed, and so made no attempt to follow up the impression he knew that he had made on her. A protracted illness, to which she soon fell a victim, deprived him of any opportunity even to see her for some time, but, after her recovery, he met her again at the carnival in Rome and thought her more beautiful than ever. Her engagement had meanwhile been broken, and Goethe was almost tempted to allow his relation to her to assume a more serious aspect. But he put the temptation from him and they kissed and parted. Her peculiar appeal to Goethe, quite apart from her beauty, — which, as we see from the portrait of her and from his own lines in this connection, was unusual, — seems to have lain in her aspiring intellectuality. She was one of those women who resent the masculine habit — then, of course, far more common than now — of ignoring a woman's mind. Goethe tells us that when he and she were at Castel Gondolfo together she, one day, complained bitterly that she had never been taught English. Her brother, she said, knew the language well, and often she envied him the enlarged horizon this knowledge afforded. "*There* are English newspapers," she continued, pointing to a collection on the table of the room where they were talking, "and they treat of happenings all over the

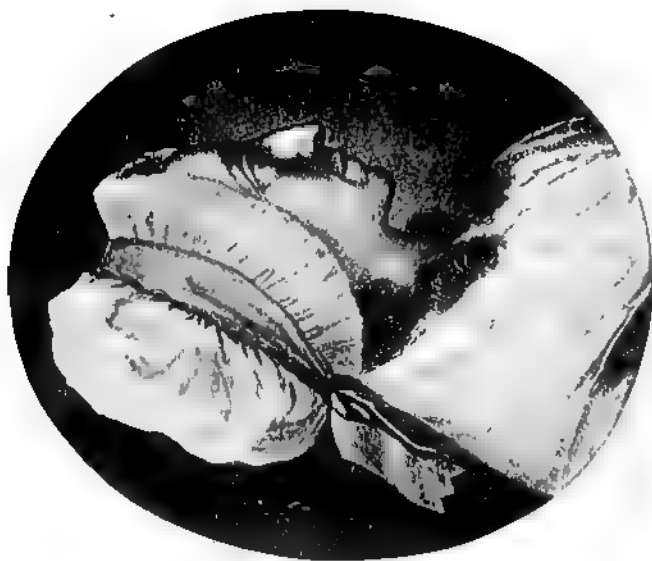
GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

world, but I can't read them. Men do not want to teach women things. They don't like to teach us to write for fear we will write love-letters; they wouldn't even teach us to read if it weren't that it pleases them to see us occupied with a prayer-book."

This feminine outburst, long before women generally had begun to be conscious of their deprivation of "rights," hugely interested Goethe, of course, and he promptly began to teach the Milanese English, — quite as much, I will do him the credit to believe, because he wanted to help a woman to knowledge for which she thirsted as because that woman was young and very beautiful.

Very soon after Goethe's departure from Rome, Maddalena married the son of the famous etcher, Volpato, who belonged to Angelica's circle. She died in 1825, and so did not live to see in print, in the *Italianische Reise*, Goethe's glowing description of her as a young girl. Angelica was the confidant of Goethe throughout this episode, and there is reason to believe that in the correspondence which she burned before her death there were several letters which would have thrown light on the Riggi matter and perhaps on her own relations to the poet also.

As it is, however, we have fifteen letters from the painter to Goethe, which have been lately published by the Goethe Society, and which prove only too



BARBARA SCHULTHEISS.
See p. 279.



MADDALENA RIGGI (SUPPOSED).
From a drawing by Goethe.



CHRISTIANE VULPIUS.
From a drawing by Goethe. See p. 291.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

clearly that, on her side at least, the attachment was a very deep one. "Though this love of hers was half due," Frances Gerard says, "to admiration for his genius, . . . it nevertheless seems to have coloured every thought of her mind for years." Angelica was forty-seven at this time, and Goethe was eight years her junior. Her efforts to keep her memory green in his heart, after he had left Rome and its associations behind him, are therefore rather painful reading. Immediately after he had gone she wrote, on May 10, 1788, "Dearest Friend, — Parting from you has penetrated my heart and soul with grief; the day of your departure was one of the most sorrowful of my life, only for the dear lines you wrote to me before you started, and for which I have already thanked you.

"Now again I thank you from my heart for your letter from Florence, which I looked for with longing. A few nights ago I dreamed that I had received letters from you, and that I felt consoled and said, 'It is well that he has written, else I would soon have died of grief.'

"I am content to know that you are well; may Heaven continue to keep you thus. I live such a sad life — and because I cannot see what I most desire, all and everyone is indifferent to me, except our good friend, Rieffenstein, with whom I speak of you. The

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Sundays, which once were days of joy, have become the saddest days, — they seem to say he returns no more, but I will not believe this; the words 'return no more' sound too hard. Now I will say not another sorrowful word. Do you know I have something of yours upon which you bestowed great care; I have to thank the good Schutz for this treasure. Your little pine tree stands now in my garden and is my dearest plant.¹ One thing more I have which I destined for you before it was mine, — the figure of which I have spoken to you, — the Muse. I am only waiting for a good opportunity to send it to you. You will help me in this, for it would be a thousand pities if it should meet any injury.

"I have made some alteration in the design for the title-page [of *Egmont*], also I have made it somewhat larger. I recollect that I said to you that I could myself engrave it on the copper; it is, however, a long time since I have done etching, and I know not how it might succeed, and the proofs would take a long time before I could be sure of success, consequently I should be glad to know if the de-

¹ Goethe himself writes of this: "This pine cutting from the Botanical Gardens grew and flourished for many years in Angelica's garden. . . . But, alas! after the death of my much-valued friend, new people entered into possession who considered the pine detrimental to their flower-beds; and late visitors to Rome have brought me news that no trace of its existence remains."

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

sign which will be finished to-day should be given to Herr Lips or sent to you. I shall wait your directions.

"In Florence you will have seen many beautiful things that you will tell me of. Zucchi thanks you heartily for your kind remembrance of him, and desires to continue in your recollection; we speak every day of you. . . . Give me the only satisfaction I can now enjoy, that of hearing from you often. When I know that you are well and content I will try to reconcile myself to my fate. Farewell, my dear friend, and keep me in your thoughts.

"ANGELICA."

In even more passionate language we find her writing to him on May 17: "I thank you a thousand times, my dear friend, for the joy your letter from Florence has given me. Your commissions I have handed over to our good Rath Rieffenstein, and I have made your excuses to him and Abbate Spina; both love you dearly, but who can help doing that? I am not at all pleased with Herr Kayser; he has left you very much alone and evidently prefers the library to your society. Ah! if I were in his place! and how I envy him! It is true that in spirit I am often as near you as your own shadow, but let the power of imagination be ever so strong, it yet remains only an imagination. If I had known your

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

address I would have written you at Florence. You will find my answer to your first letter at Milan, but I cannot leave you last without an answer. I forget, however, what has happened since you left. When I think of you I grow confused. I sit with the pen in my hand, have much to say, would wish to say much to you — every pulse of my heart suffers and complains. But of what use is all this? Nothing I can say will bring you back to me! It were better that I remained silent; your feeling heart can imagine the rest.

“ Since the 23d ¹ — that last and fatal day — I have been in a dream out of which I cannot rouse myself — the lovely sky, the most lovely scenery, alas! even the divine in art excites nothing in me — I am indifferent to all. I really believe I am on the outer edge of that folly of which we often talked. [Suicide?] In the other world I hope it will be arranged that all dear friends meet never more to part, and so I look for a happier life above.

“ I hope to hear that you are comfortably lodged in Milan; everything about you interests me. Your health and well-being are as near to my heart as my own. . . .

“ This evening, the 28th, when I came home, I

¹ It was on April 23, 1788, just eighteen months after he had entered Rome, that he left the city — forever.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

found your dear letter upon the table. How my heart beat as I opened it, and how much I thank you for the contents and for your friendship, of which you gave me proof by sending me those dear lines which will help to make my weary days less hard to bear. May Heaven, my dear friend, reward you for this and keep you from everything that may annoy you. . . . Your *Tasso* will be received by me with love and joy, 'yet it is joining new links to the chain'; nevertheless every word you have written is precious to me because it is yours.

"Some days ago I went with Zucchi to visit your apartment (what I saw there I will tell you when I have seen it under better circumstances). We went up into your cabinet. I felt as if I were in a sanctuary or shrine where one dwelt whom all honoured. I could hardly tear myself away — I remembered what lovely music the excellent Kayser played once here for you and me. Ah! those dear, happy days. I must stop and beg your pardon for allowing my pen to run on so wildly. Zucchi desires his most friendly remembrance, also our good Herr Rath and the Abbate Spina. Whenever we meet we speak of you. I am looking forward to the letter from Milan which you have promised me."

Evidently Angelica did not send this letter at once, for one finds added to it a postscript dated a

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

fortnight later (June 7): " Pray forgive the length of this letter, and the disorder with which it is written; my mind was half distracted when I wrote. Not a line from you from Milan! Have you forgotten your kind promise? It fills me with anxiety; it may be that Herr Rath [Rieffenstein, through whom this correspondence appears to have been carried on] had letters from you by yesterday's post, but he is in Frascati with his housekeeper, who has been ill but now gives every hope of perfect recovery. I shall not see him until next Monday; I shall therefore wait no longer; as you gave me permission to address you at Weimar, I shall do so. I trust you have already happily arrived there, and that you have met all your friends. Happy Weimar, and thrice happy those who are blessed with your presence there! The only consolation left to me is the hope that you keep me in your remembrance. That you may be always well and happy is the sincerest wish of your devoted A.

" Please remember me and Zucchi and other friends to Herr Kayser. I told you in my last that I had the ' Muse ' in my own hands, and that I was only waiting an opportunity to send it to you with the help of Herr Rath, also the furnished design for the title-page, about which I expect an answer from you. Dearest friend, pardon this long letter, which

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

for the rest is the answer to two of yours with which I was made happy. To-morrow will be Sunday — once such a longed-for day! . . .”

Goethe had not found it at all easy to break away from Rome and Angelica. From Milan he wrote, on May 25, “The parting from Rome has cost me more than is right and fitting for my years;” and he added that he was “experiencing at least seven changes of mood every hour.” On the following day he declared that he was going to buy a hammer and break pieces from the rock of his homeward journey, in order to drive away “the bitterness of death.” Yet he knew that what must be must, and by the time Angelica was writing her June postscript just quoted, he was characteristically making another woman-friend happy by permitting her to bask for a while in the sunshine of his presence. For he had arrived at Constance June 4 and was there *being visited* at the inn by his Zurich friend, Barbara Schulthess, who had for years clung to him with sentimental devotion.

Goethe's friendship with this simple Zurich woman, his senior by four years only, is one of the most creditable things about his whole career. For it was just friendship, having about it nothing of the dross which is mixed up with many of his other relations with women. Barbara Schulthess was one of

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Lavater's parishioners and had had several children by her worthy merchant-husband ere she began to come, through her pastor, into close relationship with the makers of German literature. Goethe knew her first by reputation, — when he was at Ems in the early summer of 1774 with Lavater. The physiognomist was then getting letters from her and warmly sounded her praises to his companion. When Goethe first wrote Lavater, after his return home, he sent postscript messages to Frau Schulthess and, soon afterward, dispatched to her his first letter. But not until June, 1775, did he make her actual acquaintance, — while visiting Lavater in Zurich, — from which time on "Bäbe," as he came to call her to Lavater, had an intimate share in all his thoughts and plans. He told her of his love for Lili, and she understood so well the peculiar appeal of that young person to his heart that, twenty years later, when she met Frau Türckheim for the first time, she wrote all about it to Goethe, comparing her happiness over the good talk they two had had about him to the pleasure she was wont to derive from reading his noblest books. Fräulein von Klettenberg she also came to know and to love, and when Goethe sent to Zurich the sixth book of *Wilhelm Meister* with its "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul" she promptly wrote to him: "Thanks, dear friend, for your gift;

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

the last book of your *Wilhelm* brought me many memories of a soul that I honoured highly and loved deeply — though I did not quite wish to go her way." It is interesting just here to note that, only last winter, the first version of the first four books of *Wilhelm Meister* came to light in Zurich, thus pushing somewhat into the foreground the personality of Goethe's noble woman-friend. Yet nowhere in English is any satisfactory sketch of Frau Schulthess to be found, and even the German commentators have, for the most, been singularly reticent about her. The few facts that one can find about her are, therefore, the more to be cherished. It is known that Goethe made her one of the first confidants of his Weimar plan, and that it was his custom to send her early copies of all his works so long as their friendship endured. Thus *Iphigenie*, *Tasso* and *Egmont* found their way to her from Rome, and *Hermann und Dorothea* was no sooner off the press than a copy of it was deposited at Bäbe Schulthess' door, causing her to write the author, "It is as if old Homer were again among us producing stories of his own day."

Of the "under side," so to speak, of Goethe's life this simple loyal Swiss woman knew nothing. Quite innocently, she kept writing him to tell her of his family interests — just as she always told him of

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

hers. Her kind and devoted husband had died in 1778, some of her daughters had married and others had passed away, all of which she related to Goethe in her letters. Why he would not reply in kind she never in the least understood. His withdrawal — partly because of embarrassment in the face of these questions, partly because of his immense intellectual development which Barbara could not follow, and very largely because he had definitely broken with Lavater, whom she continued greatly to admire — finally caused the bond between them to fall away. So that by late in the summer of 1797 this "beautiful pure relation," as Bābe had called it only a short time before (July 25, 1797), imperceptibly became a thing of the past. Yet because of its tenderness and ideality it will always remain one of the most beautiful episodes in the life of this greatest of Germans.

We have wandered far, in talking of Goethe's Zurich friend, from the heartaches of his Roman comrade, now grown very keen. Angelica is said to have been a great flirt in her youth, and Smith, in his *Life of Nollekins*, tells of having actually seen her once in a private box at Drury Lane, playing with Nathaniel Dance and the young Swiss artist, Fuseli, in a manner nothing short of scandalous. For on this occasion, finding an arm of each suitor embracing her waist, she contrived, while her own arms were

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

folded before her on the front of the box over which she was leaning, to squeeze the hand of both lovers so that each considered himself the man of her choice. This story sounds like an imaginative flight on Smith's part, but if she ever *had* led men on, she was liberally punished for it by what she suffered after Goethe left Rome. Her letters continue to be full of desperate longing for him. As witness:—

“ ROME, August 5, 1788.

“ Dreaming again, you'll say.

“ But I know you forgive me.

“ I dreamed last night you had come back. I saw you a long way off and hastened to the entrance door, seized both your hands, which I pressed so closely to my heart that with the pain I awoke. I was angry with myself that my joy in my dream should have been so great, and that, in consequence, my happiness had been shortened. Still, to-day, I am content, for I have your dear letter written July 19. That, in spite of your many distractions and occupations, with friends and acquaintances around you, you are in spirit often in Rome, this does not surprise me; but that you think of me is a proof of your goodness for which I am infinitely grateful. I rejoice that you are well and wish you an unbroken course of happiness and content. For me, I live the life of hope in

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

a better life [Angelica was a devout Catholic]. . . . The new picture [The Burial of Our Lord, by Daniel Volterra] remains in its case, and only those shall see it who are capable of seeing it. . . . When shall we see it together? I live continuously between fear and hope — alas, more fear than hope — but I must be silent; of what use are my complaints? You want to know what I am working at. . . . Soon I must consider the subject for my large picture for Catherine of Russia. I have as yet done nothing, and I want to make it as good as possible. To do this I must imagine it is Sunday, and that you are coming to my studio. Ah! the dear past. It does not do to think of that.

“ My portrait, or it would be better to call it the painting, which I presented to the gallery in Florence, has been accepted. I received the letters a few days ago and that they have placed me in a good light and beside a very famous man — no less than Michaelangelo Buonarroti. I wish I could stand near him, not in effigy alone, but in his works; but this is too ambitious. The Grand Duke, as a proof of his kind acceptance of the portrait, has honoured me with the gift of a large gold medal. Now it is time for me to stop speaking of myself; I have already said too much. If you had not sent me the promised sketches of the neighbourhood, I should

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

have most certainly reminded you. Now that I have them I find my thoughts often, often, very often there. Dear friend, Rome is beautiful, but no more so for me. Let me be still, let me once more be the master of my pen!

"The letter from your young friend has given me much pleasure; also I am glad to know Herr Kayser is coming back, and that Herr Herder is coming. But *you* are not coming; that is my everlasting sorrow, and my lamentation.

"Farewell, be happy and do not forget me. I honour and esteem you with all my heart.

"ANGELICA."

One of the results of Goethe's visit to Rome was to inspire in all his Weimar intimates a desire to go there also. The first to arrive was Herr Herder, who promptly proceeded to go as far towards falling in love with Angelica as the possession of an excellent wife to whom he was supposed to be devoted, could allow. "She is true heavenly music," he writes of the artist, while she in her turn gives her opinion of the philosopher in the following letter to Goethe: "How joyful I am on the days that your letters come, and that I hear of your well-being. I thank you for your late letter of the fourth of August and of the first of September. I am very much pleased

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

that the ' Muse ' has at last reached you and that my little remembrance has given you pleasure, and that you consider it as a small proof of my true and unutterable esteem for you.

" On the 19th this month, when I came home at my usual hour, I found Bury in the drawing-room with Herr Herder. It gave me joy to see this excellent man, your friend. . . . The Duchess-mother [Amalia] will arrive at the end of the month. You know already, my dear friend, how much I wish to do honour to those whom you like, and to be of use to them if I can; it rejoices me that your friends have come at the best time to enjoy the neighbourhood. It will soon be the season when we were together at Castel Gondolfo. Every place where you sketched will be dear to me, all will remind me of what is past, and with such a memory can I hope for enjoyment in the present? In my imagination I will see you everywhere. We shall only spend a few days there this year, as we intend to make a short tour in October. You console me with the hope of a future. I will try to hope the best; it may make the present less unbearable. That my little offering which you so kindly accepted should have arrived at a time and on a day which shall ever be sacred to me, — this coincidence makes me happy. May I live to keep that day with you again! 'Tis Sunday, and instead

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

of going to fetch you, I am writing to you these few lines with the little pen I stole from you.

" I have seen Herr Herder again; what a worthy man he is, and speaks as he writes. We showed him your bust, which pleases your friend much. I am content with the likeness. When I wanted to pay Herr Trieppel my debt, he said you had paid him. Consequently I have to thank you infinitely for such a dear and precious present. I spend many moments in the day looking at it. . . . The garden has produced nothing wonderful this year — not a single monstrum. The dear pine grows; I have not transplanted it. You would laugh over my anxiety when the sky is darkened with clouds and there are signs of a storm. I run into the garden and place the young plant under cover for fear it might be injured; all the rest I leave to their fate. Pardon, dear friend, the length of this letter, and the disorder with which it is written. You know it is well meant. Farewell, my dear friend, forget me not. To know you live content is my dearest wish. A. Z. K.

" I hear *Tasso* has advanced very far towards completion, as also another work of which you said nothing to me. I remember the happy time when you read to us your manuscript; those days will never, I fear, come again; the very thought fills me with sadness."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Anna Amalia arrived in Rome, soon after this, for a stay which lasted nearly two years. Inasmuch as she greatly admired Goethe and soon came to be Angelica's warm friend, also, the letters from Rome now take on a much happier tone. "Do you know, my dear friend," the artist joyfully writes the poet, "that I am coming to Weimar? Have you ever dreamt of such a thing? Her excellency the duchess has invited, in the most cordial manner, good Rath Rieffenstein, Zucchi and me to accompany her back or to follow her. . . . Blessed Weimar, which since it has given me the joy of knowing you, I have so often envied, where my thoughts fly so constantly, shall I really see it and see you there? Oh, most beautiful dream! And still I hope that even before this journey comes off we may see you in Rome. That the Duchess has shown herself so gracious to me, I have to thank you, my dear and best friend. This gracious princess honours me with a visit constantly, and she allows me to go to her. We often speak of you, and then what joy fills my soul!

"A few evenings ago her excellency visited the museum, attended by her whole suite. . . . Zucchi and I had the honour of accompanying them. It was quite a festival for me. Nevertheless, there was something wanting to make me perfectly content.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

Your name was repeated in the hall of the Muses, but I looked about me and only saw you in spirit. When we all stood before the Apollo, some one proposed that we should offer a prayer to the god. Herr Herder said we should each ask for something. My prayer to Apollo was that he would inspire you to come to Rome. O that my wish may be granted! But it must be before I go to Weimar. . . . I hear much in praise of your *Tasso*. I am rejoicing over the hope you have given me, that you may still read it to me. It is a consolation for much. May Apollo strengthen you in this good purpose. I thank you meanwhile for having thought of me. . . . Zucchi and I often talk of you, but alas! that is not the same as *with* you.

"Ah, the happy time; the dear Sundays which I will think of so long as I live. . . . I am glad that you like your present situation, and that you have time to prosecute your work. May you live always happy and content, and if you have an idle moment, think of me. Farewell, best of friends.

"A. K."

In several of the Duchess' letters to Goethe there are appreciative references to Angelica. "I have sat twice," one of them runs, "to her, and the picture promises to be a splendid success. The last

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

time Herder read for us your poems, and good Angelica was so inspired that the portrait seemed to grow under her fingers."

But even this pleasant interlude had to come to an end and, by the last of May, 1789, we find Angelica writing to Goethe that his friends have left Rome for good. "It seems to me," she adds, "that I have been in a dream of pleasant companionship and have just awakened to resume my solitary life again. . . . For a long time I have been intending to write and thank you for the eight volumes of your works¹ which you sent me. I delayed because I feared you would say I wrote too often. But Silence is not forgetfulness. How could I forget a friend whom I honour as much as I do you, and shall ever continue to honour so long as I live? My industry is much as usual, but who is so industrious as you are? The research and the writing itself are far more useful than mere handiwork. It is good to cultivate all knowledge, and who does that does well. Continue to enjoy yourself in every way that can make you happy. I wish I could write to you of art, or of artists, or of any other agreeable subject. It had been my intention to make amends for my silence

¹ Goethe presented her with a splendidly bound edition "that she might renew her acquaintance with her native language." The German of her letters to him is often misspelled.

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

by a long letter, but the absence of my good friends makes me feel so sad, that I can only say that I hope to live in your memory as you do in mine, where your remembrance will always and forever be dear.

“ A. K. Z.”

On August first she writes that Rome is fast becoming a desert to her, because all her new friends have left her there alone. “ Paintings and statues are beautiful to look at,” she admits, “ but to live surrounded by true friends is better; these are thoughts I must not dwell on — they disturb my rest and sadden my heart. I try to occupy myself as much as possible, so that the hours may slip away unnoticed until a better time comes. May you be always well and happy, and grant me sometimes the happiness of a few lines. The pine is in full growth. . . . Once more I recommend myself to you, my honoured friend, and remain, as always, with great esteem, A.”

Goethe's silence and aloofness all this time are, of course, due to the fact that Christiane Vulpius has now come into his life. He had, indeed, been home from Italy less than a month when he entered with her upon the marriage of conscience (*Ehestand*) which he ratified publicly immediately after the battle of Jena, their son being then seventeen years

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

old. But Angelica appears to have known nothing of his new love. Only when she learns that, though he is coming to Italy to conduct the Duchess Amalia home, he will not revisit Rome, is the conviction forced upon her that he no longer "cares." What more natural for her than to think that he must seize eagerly this opportunity to revisit Rome and his dear friends there? Instead of which he makes it a condition of undertaking the journey that he should not be asked to proceed further than Venice — he who, only a year before at Easter time, could hardly restrain his longing to be in the Holy City!

Angelica never saw Goethe again, though she lived on in Rome until her death, — nearly twenty years later, — and in 1797 he almost came, once more, to the city where they had been so happy together. A letter he sent her that year shows him the calm Olympian he had now definitely become — at least to the outside world:

• "WEIMAR, 25 June, 1797.

"The hope I had entertained, most honoured friend, of seeing you in the coming year is, through this most miserable war, at an end, as the way to Rome is completely barred, at least for the present. Professor Meyer, whose continued residence in Rome is the groundwork for me still to cherish the hope of

IN ITALY WITH ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

revisiting that delightful city [he evidently wished to make it quite plain that he had no thought of coming to Rome *for the sake of seeing Angelica!*], tells me that he has had the honour of waiting upon you. He has gone for the moment to Florence, but returns to Rome shortly. . .

“ Will you pardon me a question? A friend of mine, a most respectable tradesman in Leipzig, has prepared a catalogue, with infinite care, of the engravings which have been taken from your paintings. This work has occupied him for many years, and he is now bringing it out. He desires nothing more ardently than to have a short account prefixed of the life of the artist (whom he esteems so highly and about whose work he has long been occupied).

“ When he told me this very natural desire, I remembered that Herr Zucchi, when he was collecting information about his own family, had also made a notice of the life of his distinguished wife. If you will allow me to have this to communicate to my friend, you will confer on me a new proof of your friendship, and you will likewise rejoice the hearts of your many adorers.

“ Not many days ago your excellent picture of Cupid and Psyche which I saw in Dessau, gave me the most exquisite pleasure. You cannot conceive the impression these heavenly creatures make, when

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

seen amidst the snowflakes of the icy north, which are only suited to a wild beast or a dull huntsman. It is not necessary to remind you that these words do not apply to the Dessau country. The Luiseum in which the painting is kept is, for the rest, in a garden. Such a background cannot impair its beauty.

“Farewell, and kindly answer either yourself or through others.

“GOETHE.”

Thus, in the formal request from one distinguished personage to another for biographical data for publicity purposes, ends all communication, so far as is known, between these two who had once meant so much to each other.

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTIANE

AND now we come to the story of the one woman Goethe *did* marry — only to find, curiously enough, that hers is the hardest story of all to tell. To explain why he left Frederika, what he found attractive in Charlotte Buff, the reason he broke with the lovely Lili and the truth of his relations to Frau von Stein was comparatively simple inasmuch as there is a certain consensus of contemporary opinion upon almost all of these episodes. But no contemporary writer approved of Goethe's marriage; and I have yet to discover any two of his biographers who are agreed either as to the character of Christiane Vulpius or upon the psychology of Goethe's relation to her. Almost all are exceedingly severe in their judgment of the woman. One English reviewer unfeelingly dubs her "a fat and intemperate termagant" and pronounces her marriage to Goethe "an act of poetic justice administered by fate as a punishment for his youthful weaknesses in matters of love." The flaw in this inter-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

pretation lies, of course, in the fact that it was Goethe himself who administered the "punishment." He, who had always so shrunk from marriage, deliberately tied himself fast to this "termagant," and that, too, when she had already been his for over eighteen years. Almost any explanation of the step is more tenable than this one.

Düntzer cuts the Gordian knot by blandly ignoring the illicit relation which preceded the marriage ceremony and uniformly speaks of Christiane as Goethe's wife. In defence of this he quotes two bits of contemporary history: (1) a certain letter sent by Goethe to Schiller on July 13, 1796, and (2) a reply the poet once made to a question put to him by Dora Stock, sister-in-law of Schiller's friend Körner. The lady had asked Goethe why he did not marry and he had replied gravely, that he was married, only not ceremonially. The letter referred to was written not many weeks after this retort. In it Goethe says: "To-day I, too, live to see a remarkable epoch; my marriage state is just eight years and the French Revolution seven years old." Yet no one knew better than Goethe himself that he was not married until October 19, 1806, and when he edited (in 1824) his correspondence with Schiller he discreetly cut out this reference to the anniversary of his "*Ehestand*."

CHRISTIANE

None of the Weimar ladies were so uniformly unkind to Christiane as Charlotte von Stein. The explanation of this lies, as I think, in a guilty conscience as well as in jealousy. Goethe had gone to Italy partly, at any rate, with the object of loosening the hold which Frau von Stein had upon him, but when he returned he was not nearly so much cured as he had thought he would be. If she had then received him kindly they might have continued to be warm friends. As it was, her querulous complaints drove him straight into the arms of the first attractive maiden who crossed his path. And this maiden proved so very attractive, so careful for his comfort, so perfect in her understanding of him and so unselfishly responsive to his every need, that what might have been only a passing fancy soon grew into a real bond. Charlotte von Stein was too clever a woman, I believe, not to see that the fault was chiefly in herself that she had lost Goethe's love; and of course she hated more bitterly with each year that passed the young girl who lavishly made up to him for the tragedy of her loss.

Six weeks after Goethe's return, when his long-time friend left Weimar to go to her estate, she complained, as has been recorded in a previous chapter, "Goethe parted from me as from a perfect stranger." Yet all that summer of 1788 she

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

kept urging him to visit her at Kochburg, never suspecting, in her vanity, that it was another and a younger woman, not the "rain," as he averred, which was keeping him from her side. When at length he did go, on September 5, he took with him young Fritz, Sophie von Schardt and Caroline Herder. Both friends remarked that Frau von Stein received the poet "without heart" and that Goethe, who during the journey had been very talkative, scarcely spoke the whole day. The following Sunday the entire company, including Frau von Stein, went to Rudolstadt to see the Lengefelds. On this occasion it was that Goethe and Schiller, whom Charlotte von Lengefeld was soon to marry, had their first talk together.

Back at Weimar, meanwhile, the little maiden who had given herself in deep affection to Goethe waited and watched for her famous lover's return. Christiane Vulpius was not the "low-born thing," the "cook" and "factory-girl" many writers have called her. By birth she was of rank scarcely more humble than Goethe himself. Her father, like the elder Goethe, was of the legal profession and her mother was of good middle-class stock. But where Goethe's father had gathered and guarded Christiane's father spent his money in riotous living. As a result he died, while still quite a young man, leav-

CHRISTIANE

ing a large family in very straitened circumstances. The eldest son was in the University of Jena when Goethe, before going to Italy, had been of service to him, but Christiane, having had no particular education, had been glad to get a place in the artificial flower-shop which Bertuch, Karl August's treasurer, had recently started in Weimar as a means of increasing his already ample fortune. But to say that Christiane was a "factory-girl" gives quite the wrong impression; Bertuch's venture partook more of the nature of the arts and crafts establishments with which we of to-day are familiar. There were only a few girls there, and Frau Bertuch interested herself not a little in their lives and their working conditions. So Christiane and her brother were striving with all their might to keep their little family together. Then the brother lost the private secretaryship with which he eked out the meagre returns made by his books (he afterwards became a successful author), and it seemed quite natural to appeal for aid to Goethe, who had previously proved his friend. One question, however, his delicacy in instructing his sister to stop Goethe in the Park and so present his petition.

She was very pretty, this sister — of the type which the Scotch call sonsie. She had beautiful blue eyes, full lips, long fair hair and gentle appeal-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ing manners. Goethe fell deeply in love with her at first sight and probably had little difficulty, judging by his magnetic charm for most women, in winning her ardent affection. Inside of four weeks from the day of his return to Weimar she had been established in his Garden-House on the Ilm. Yet an astonishingly long time passed before people observed anything and a much longer time before the news of his *liaison* came to the ears of the person chiefly concerned — Frau von Stein. Then, one day, Fritz met in the garden of Goethe's home among the trees a young woman whose right to be there he could not understand. He told his mother of his adventure, and she, of course, sought to learn more. "Goethe has taken the young Vulpius person for his sweetheart," she was then informed, "and has her often come to him."

It was at the beginning of March, 1789, that this disturbing news first reached Charlotte's ears. Very soon followed the letters of mutual recrimination which gave the death-blow to what had been a beautiful love.

The following December on Charlotte's own birthday, Goethe's son was born. Karl August was the child's godfather. Thus Goethe announced to the world, at the very beginning of his paternity, that he by no means intended to minimize the claims

CHRISTIANE

of this baby and of his mother. Three months after little August's birth, Goethe, about to set out for Italy for the purpose of escorting home the Duchess Anna Amalia, tenderly committed his family to the care of Herder in these words: "It has struck me that, after my absence, my maiden and my little one will be left altogether alone. Should anything befall her in which she could not help herself I have told her to turn to you." During this absence in Italy it was that Goethe, full of longing for Christiane, wrote his wonderful *Roman Elegies*.

Goethe's home life was very happy. He had always been fond of children and his delight in a son of his own could not be concealed. "My boy," he wrote to Jacobi,¹ "is a happy existence (*glückliches Wesen*). I hope that with his beautiful eyes he will see much that is good and beautiful in the world." And Christiane proved a very clever little housekeeper as well as a cheery and loving comrade. The burden of her family had been manfully shouldered by Goethe, soon after he had taken her to his home, and so there now dwelt, in the back part of the fine new house which Karl August had bought for him on the Frauenplan, her younger half-sister, Ernestine, and her aunt Juliane. For his generosity

¹ July 7, 1793.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

to these dependents Christiane was, of course, very grateful and she strove in every possible way to make her gratitude felt. So, while she would never have suited the strenuous idealism of Goethe's soaring youth, she now satisfied him utterly, resting him by her softness, charming him by her deferential sympathy and holding him by her serviceable sweetness. Just because she made no pretensions, urged no claim and was more than contented with whatever he cared to give her she approximated very closely the wife for which he had long been waiting.

Frau Aja was frankly delighted that a woman who would bring her grandchildren had usurped the place of "the Stein" in her son's heart. She early began a lively correspondence with Christiane and extended to her a daughter's welcome when, in August, 1797, Goethe brought her and his little son to Frankfort for a visit. In Weimar, however, Christiane was shunned by all the women of Goethe's circle and for a time it seemed as if he could give no more entertainments at home. Yet just when criticism of him was at its bitterest because of his recent purchase of a country estate upon which, said the gossips, he intended to settle "the Vulpius person," Goethe sent out some invitations which Weimar at once accepted! Though he felt the ex-



GOETHE AND HIS SON.
From a painting by Hans M. Schmidt.



Copyright by Louis Had, Weimar.

GARDEN OF GOETHE'S TOWN HOUSE IN WEIMAR.

CHRISTIANE

treme awkwardness of not having Christiane act as hostess in the house which she so ably administered he managed matters so that his guests were quite at their ease. When the Swedish Secretary of Legation, for instance, was his guest of honour Frau von Wolzogen and Amalia von Imhoff sat one on either side of him.

But Christiane was young and had to have some amusement herself. She found it in dancing, which was a passion with her, and she quite scandalized Weimar society by participating, even after she had become Goethe's wife, in the students' balls at Jena and in public dances at places nearer home. Her principal companion in these diversions was Nicolaus Meyer, who later became a very successful physician in Bremen and with whom Goethe, as well as Christiane, continued on terms of lifelong friendship.¹ Meyer had been a medical student at Jena, and during the winter of 1799-1800 he lodged in Weimar near the Goethe house and pursued on Christiane's hearth — to her horror — many of the experiments pertaining to his Doctor's dissertation on the Anatomy of the Mouse. But though Christiane did not enjoy this particular aspect of science she had a lively and intelligent

¹ Dr. Meyer was probably the model for the "Captain" in *Elective Affinities*.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

interest in all that pertained to natural phenomena, and Goethe, no less than the young Dr. Meyer, found in her a sympathetic comrade. Lewes says that the *Metamorphosis of Plants* as well as the *Roman Elegies* was written for her and that the botanical researches whose results are embodied in the first-named book were pursued by Goethe in her company. "How much she understood of these researches, we cannot know," he continues, "but it is certain that, unless she had shown a lively comprehension, Goethe would never have persisted in talking of them to her." The poet himself says that he and Christiane spent their time in rational talk as well as in caresses:

"Wird doch nicht immer geküsst, es wird vernünftig gesprochen."

And to further confirm the idea that Christiane had mental as well as physical attractions for Goethe we find in the Eighth of the *Roman Elegies* these interesting lines:

"Wenn du mir sagst, du habest als Kind, Geliebte, den
Menschen
Nicht gefallen, und dich habe die Mutter verschmäht,
Bis du grösser geworden und still dich entwickelt: ich
glaub' es:
Gerne denk' ich mir dich als ein besonderes Kind.

CHRISTIANE

Fehlet Bildung und Farbe doch der Blüthe des Wein-
stocks,

Wenn die Beere, gereift, Menschen und Götter entzückt."¹

The taste of geniuses in the matter of wives has often proved a puzzle to the world at large, but I think this little analysis of Christiane's peculiar endowment helps one to understand why Goethe cherished her as he did. Louise Seidler, who was much in the Goethe home after 1810, says that Christiane's naturalness especially appealed to the poet, and adds that however wanting in self-restraint her conduct outside the home may now and then have been, or however noisily she may have scolded the servants, she was really a very good-natured person and, in her devotion to Goethe, showed herself altogether admirable, carefully looking after his interests and shielding him from the many unpleasant things which might have disturbed his composure or hampered his powers of composition.² And, fond as Christiane was of balls and parties, she was also fond of household tasks and of the fireside circle. Many an evening was quietly passed

¹ When you say to me, sweetheart, that you, as a child, were not petted
That even your own mother scorned you until you had grown to be
woman,

I can full well understand it and shrink not from picturing my dear one
As quite a crude little person. Grapes in the bud oft are ugly
Which, when come to fruition, give men exquisite pleasure.

² Louise Seidler: *Erinnerungen und Leben*, p. 55.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

by Goethe playing whist in her company and that of Caroline Ulrich, her companion, with a "dummy" holding the fourth hand. This snap-shot — which we also owe to Louise Seidler — of Goethe in dressing-gown and slippers, so to speak, again helps us to understand how through "agreeable habitude," as some one has said, Christiane came, every year, to be more and more necessary to him.

Besides, there were the children. August had developed into a charming little lad of whom his mother was as proud as was his father. And together Christiane and Goethe had to mourn the loss of no less than four little ones during the first fifteen years of their union. August, as we have seen, early won his way into Charlotte von Stein's lonely heart, and Christiane, far from feeling any mean jealousy at this, tried in every way that she could to cement the bonds of this friendship because it met with the warm approval of the lad's father. Occasionally, to be sure, she made awful blunders out of the depths of her good-nature, — as when, for Charlotte's birthday in 1796, she sent her servant across to Frau von Stein bearing a cake with the legend, "Compliments of Mamsell Vulpius." Goethe had, of course, instigated the baking of the cake, intending it to be a gift from August to his kind friend, and though he profusely explained as a

CHRISTIANE

"servant's blunder" the card attached to the gift Charlotte von Stein's birthday was spoiled. Yet when Goethe wrote her, "Permit my poor little lad to further be in your presence and mould himself under your oversight; I cannot observe without emotion that you, indeed, wish him well," the lady who had formerly been the poet's love replied generously, "He does my eyes and heart good. You must find it quite natural in me to be fond of your child."

Dr. Wilhelm Bode, to whom I am indebted for this story of the cake, relates,¹ also, two other incidents about Goethe and Frau von Stein, after the poet had fallen under the spell of "the Vulpian person," which serve to make the Weimar of their day very real, I think. One is that, on a certain occasion, Charlotte sitting in the Park saw Goethe and Christiane, who were absorbed in conversation, walking straight toward her, and could only save herself, by a deft manipulation of her parasol, from what would have been a very awkward encounter. At another time, Charlotte, from the window of her house, thought she saw Goethe coming at last to visit her. She rang for her maid. "Quick, my shawl! Herr von Goethe is coming up." And then she prinked, woman-fashion, before the mirror,

¹ In his delightful and very careful biography, *Charlotte von Stein*.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

wondering the while why it took him so long to climb the stairs. Straining her ears, she listened for his knock at the door. All was silence. Finally the mortifying certainty came to her that he had come across her court and through the lower hall of her house only to shorten his walk from the Park to the Library!

The one thing which was able to draw Charlotte and Christiane momentarily together was illness on Goethe's part. In January, 1801, we find the former writing her son Fritz that she and Charlotte Schiller have shed many tears over Goethe during the last few days. Poor Christiane, meanwhile, was almost beside herself with anxiety. For this illness was a repetition of the experience of thirty years before in Frankfort. Perhaps it was on that account that the poet, in his ravings, broke forth, as Christiane was never tired of repeating, into the most moving and passionate appeals to the Saviour. Goethe was very low-spirited in his convalescence after this attack, weeping whenever August came into the room and showing in various ways that he felt keenly his responsibility for the little lad and for his mother.

I think it must have been at this time that the poet first began seriously to think of making Christiane his legal wife. Certainly he deeply appre-

CHRISTIANE

ciated the loving devotion she had shown him. To his mother he wrote (February 1, 1801), "How good and careful and loving my dear little one has shown herself you will imagine; I cannot praise her unwearied activity enough." Soon after this he took Christiane on a little journey with him, and ere long he let himself be seen often in public with her. At a dinner which he gave to the Countess Egloffstein and the Duchess's maids of honour Christiane even welcomed the guests! But Weimar society received its most painful shock when, at the Birthday *Redoute* of January 29, August Goethe impersonated "Amor" while his mother looked on from the audience with quite as much enjoyment as if she had been the wife and not merely the "*Hausmamsell*"¹ of the great poet.

Yet the way in which, on this and similar occasions, women born in the purple drew their skirts as she passed could not but wound Christiane's sensitive soul. To Nicolaus Meyer, whom she could trust, she unveils her real self and, after a letter devoted to descriptions of balls she had recently attended, we find her saying pathetically,² "But I have no one in whom I can confide, and the theatre is my only joy. About the Geheimrath I

¹ This is the name by which Charlotte sometimes called Christiane in her letters.

² *Briefe von Goethe und seiner Frau an Nicolaus Meyer*, p. 79.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

worry a good deal because he is often in very low spirits and then I have much to bear. Still, I am as cheerful as I can be, for I know that he is always ill when he is like that. Don't mention this, though, when you write. One must never say, you know, that he is ill." In these letters to the Bremen doctor we find the real Christiane as we find her nowhere else. Her first thought is always for the comfort and welfare of the man she so ardently loves. But one sees there reflected, also, her naïve joy in dancing and social pleasures and her fondness for such delicacies of the table as Meyer was wont to send her: French wine, fresh butter, herrings and lampreys!

Many biographers have tried to put an unpleasant interpretation upon Christiane's friendship with Nicolaus Meyer because his portrait hung always in her bedroom and she wrote constantly to him. Surely though there can be no mistaking the spirit of the following letter — and it is a typical one:

"WEIMAR, April 12, [1805].

"DEAR FRIEND, I am perfectly sure that you know that it isn't carelessness or forgetfulness in me which has caused me not to write. But I am in a hard situation. The Geheimrath hasn't had any healthy hours since his fortieth birthday

CHRISTIANE

but many bad attacks in the course of which people fear lest he will die. Except him and you I have no friend in all the world. And you are so far away that you're as good as lost. I needn't tell you how terribly hard it would be for me if such an unfortunate thing happened as that I would have to stand alone. Ernestine is very near the grave and Auntie grows all the while more and more weak. Then, the burden of keeping this great house weighs down upon me heavily, and though none of these people suspect what I feel, I can't keep it all to myself any longer. For here there is no friend to whom I can say all that lies on my heart. I might tell it to people enough, I suppose, but it isn't easy for me to unbosom myself and so I go on my lonely way.

"Two days ago I accompanied August, who is now on his way to the Fair at Frankfort with a little company of people, as far as Erfurt. The Geheimrath I had left in good health, but I had been there only a few hours when a messenger came to say that he was very ill. I journeyed back at once and found him in a very bad way. As I write he is considerably better through the care of Dr. Stark, but not out of bed, and I see no good prospect. When you answer this letter address me care of my brother or of Doctor Buchholz's wife, because I know the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Geheimrath doesn't like to have me write about his illness. O God, if you were only here! I don't believe these doctors understand his case — or else there is no help for him. . . . But I beg you, when you answer this, not to address the letter to me, for it will in that case fall into his hands. And if this letter is not written as it should be pardon me; I am writing it at his bedside as he sleeps a little. Write me a comforting letter as soon as you can and tell me if it is in any way possible to see you. This is always my wish for, though I may not have written, no day passes without our speaking of you; and every morning, when I come into my room, I give the day's greeting to your picture. Farewell. I am as I have ever been,

“ Your Friend,

“ C. V.” ¹

The year following this letter both Ernestine and the sick aunt died, so that Christiane turned to Goethe even more than before for companionship and for comfort. Then came the opportunity of her life to show how deep and unselfish was her love for him. Jena had just had its terrible battle (on October 14, 1806), and to the neighbouring town of Weimar came rude bands of drunken troopers

¹ *Briefe an Nicolaus Meyer*, p. 95.

CHRISTIANE

and groups of ruthless officers all bent upon rapine and plunder. Goethe's house, with its collection of beautiful things and its promise of satisfying fare, appealed especially to the plunderers. But it happened that Wilhelm von Türckheim, the son of the lovely Lili, was one of the French officers in charge of the riotous throng, and with him Goethe proceeded to the castle, where it was arranged that Marshal Ney and a band of his troopers should be quartered with the poet. Sixteen men, thereupon, went to the house, and, after being fed, fell into a deep sleep downstairs in the servants' quarters.

Goethe, meanwhile, returned and retired for the night. But Marshal Ney had not yet come in, and while Riemer, then the tutor of Goethe's son, waited up for him, two tirailleurs came to the door and noisily demanded admission. Riemer let them in and gave them food and wine, after which they began to look about for a bed to their liking. They were not so easily satisfied as their comrades had been and, in their half-drunken tour of the house, came at length to Goethe's own room and demanded that he give them his bed. Had Christiane not thrown herself between their bayonets and the body of her lover Goethe would in all probability have lost his life.

Moreover, all the time that the enemy were

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

quartered in the house Christiane was the butt of their coarse jokes, so that now, in a flash, Goethe seems to have seen that he himself was grossly insulting his boy's mother by keeping her in a situation liable to such insults. On October 17, 1806, therefore, he wrote to Günther, Court Preacher and Chief Councillor of Consistory: "During these days and nights an old purpose of mine has come to ripeness. I want to recognize fully and legally as mine my little friend who has done so much for me, and now has lived through these hours of trial with me. Tell me, worthy, reverend sir and father, how to proceed that, as soon as possible, Sunday or earlier, we may be married. What steps have to be taken? Could you not perform the ceremony yourself? I should like it to take place in the sacristy of City Church. Give the answer to the messenger, if possible, I beg."

On Sunday, October 19, with wedding rings dated the fourteenth, the marriage took place in the sacristy of the Court and Garrison Church, Günther having no jurisdiction over the City Church. Only August and his tutor were present. Thus did Christiane, the former flower-worker, become the wife of Germany's greatest poet.

Of course Weimar was now louder than ever in its condemnation of Goethe. But he quietly set

CHRISTIANE

himself to the task of getting his wife received, tactfully choosing the house of a stranger as the scene of her social début.¹ Johanna Schopenhauer must have won his eternal gratitude for the way in which she carried off the situation. "I received her," she afterwards wrote her son, "as if I did not know who she had been hitherto. I saw plainly how my behaviour gladdened him. At first the few other ladies with me were formal and stiff, but afterwards they followed my example. Goethe remained almost two hours and was more talkative and friendly than he has been for years. He has as yet introduced her in person to no one but me. He trusted that I, as a stranger and a dweller in large cities, would receive his wife as she must be received; she was indeed much confused, but I soon helped her through."

Four days later Johanna paid her return visit. Christiane was now launched and Goethe henceforth showed her all honour and insisted that she be welcomed in friendly fashion by all who wished to be his friends. To be sure, Christiane, partly by reason of her inherent good nature and a good deal because she strove always to ward off possible unpleasantnesses, made it very easy for him by refusing to push herself. So their relations to the

¹ On the evening after their marriage.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

world about them gradually became natural and comfortable ones, Goethe continuing to be as free abroad as he had been before his marriage and Christiane continuing, also, to have her own social relations. Most people accepted after a while the new state of affairs without much comment, but Frau von Stein more than ever resented "the Vulpius person." For where she and her friends had suffered grievously, as a result of the political situation, Christiane had profited by the disorders of the day. No "good" woman could fail to be indignant at such a turn of fate! Moreover, she honestly felt that Christiane was not one to bring up properly any son of Goethe's — even a son to whom she happened to be the mother. "He is already accustomed," we find her saying in a letter to her own son, Fritz,¹ "to drown his troubles in drink. Lately he drank seventeen glasses of champagne in a club of his mother's class, and in my own house I have had difficulty in keeping him from too much wine."

Unhappily, Christiane was very fond of wine. Her father had died of drink, and for many years she had found her only pleasures among the simple folk to whom drink is one of the great joys of life. Goethe never refers to this dark side of his domestic re-

¹ January 12, 1801. This was during Goethe's illness, already referred to, and while August was staying at her house.

CHRISTIANE

lations and we know very little more about it than that it was there. It must however be borne in mind as we follow his friendships with other women. Yet Christiane had many very fine qualities, the qualities of her defects, I dare say. She was generous, kindly in her interpretation of people, and she made friends of everyone who met her without prejudice. When Goethe's mother died she went to Frankfort, in Goethe's stead, to administer the estate, and Henriette Schlosser, one of the family connection, then wrote of her: "We all like her thoroughly; and feeling this, she is grateful and glad and returns it, and was quite frank and had the fullest confidence in us. Her outer being has something common — not so her inner. Her behaviour at the division of the inheritance was liberal and fine, an occasion certain to betray it if anything mean were in her. We are all glad to know her and to judge her after her deservings, and to be able to defend her to others, for an untold quantity of injustice is done her." Of August, who had come over from his university quarters at Heidelberg to be with his mother, Henriette writes: "He is a very dear, good lad, sensible, warm-hearted, true. He does not, like his father, belong to the order of geniuses. Also, he is enormously glad that his *mother* is now *his father's wife*; he does not seem to

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

love the same things as his father, and will certainly be an honest citizen-man of business, yet without being dry; he is extremely lively and light-hearted, and takes pleasure in literature, clings, childlike, to his parents, and is confiding towards us all. We are thoroughly charmed with him."

Christiane's pride in her handsome tall son was a thing beautiful to behold and one is glad that she did not live to see in him the degeneration for which her own bad inheritance was probably chiefly responsible. For when she was only fifty and should have had many years of happiness and health before her she died, in great agony, of what Moebius characterizes as "epilepsy induced by alcoholism."¹ Goethe's grief was terrible. As she, who had been his fond companion and tender wife for nearly thirty years, lay dying he threw himself on his knees at her bedside and broke into the despairing cry, "Thou wilt not leave me! no! no! thou canst not leave me!" When the doctor, seeing that the end was near, called him for the last time to his wife's side he followed sobbing. Taking Christiane's hand in his he caressed her brow, but when, opening her eyes, she tried in vain to speak to him, he left the room in an agony of sorrow. In his letters to friends he speaks several times of his loneliness now that his

¹ Moebius' *Goethe*, Vol. II, p. 244.

CHRISTIANE

"dear little wife" has left him, and on June 12, 1816, he wrote Louise Seidler, "The only way to make life endurable in the face of my great loss is to reckon up gradually all the goodness and love that is still left to me." In his poetry there are several tributes to her memory, but the most beautiful, I think, is found in these four lines written on the day of her death, lines which, because of their very simplicity, are a more striking record of affection than any of his poems of passion:

"Du versuchst, O Sonne, vergebens,
Durch die düstern Wolken zu scheinen!
Der ganze Gewinn meines Lebens
Ist ihren Verlust zu beweinen."¹

¹ "In vain, O sun, thou seekest
The heavy clouds to pierce!
Now that Life's joy has gone away
Naught profits me but tears."

CHAPTER XII

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESES

IN considering the career of Anna Amalia, the elder of the two duchesses with whom Goethe's life at Weimar is bound up, I am reminded of that saying about the great love necessarily felt by a people for those who write the people's songs. Anna Amalia is beloved of the Germans — and especially of the Germans in Weimar — because *she* was a maker of songs. Not literally, though she did write music, too; but metaphorically. For she it was who organized amusements, acted as mistress of the revels and fused by her own lovable personality all the dissonant elements in the Court life of her day. In one of Goethe's early letters home he says, speaking of the Weimar life into which he is trying to fit himself, "With the Duke's mother I have very good times and carry on all sorts of jokes and pranks." An authoritative introduction, this, to the spirit chiefly responsible for the "*lustige Zeit*" in Weimar!

There has never been, before or since, in any Ger-

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESES

man Court, such worship of wit, such plenary indulgence for whatever folly genius might commit and such glorious disregard for stupid and hampering conventions as at Weimar during the period¹ immediately following Goethe's advent in the town. Anna Amalia never grew old but I think it helps to make her seem a sensible person to recall that, at this time of her life, she was really young — only thirty-six. The trying years of a regency entirely devoted to the education and development of her sons had just come to an end and she now found herself, for the first time in her life, free to have some good times of her own. Who will blame her, therefore, that she turned her resourceful brain to the planning of intelligent pleasures?

Like many gay people, Anna Amalia had a serious and highly introspective side. A few years before Goethe came to Weimar she had written down a little outline of her life, in reading which we learn that there had been much, in her early womanhood, calculated to render her anything but irresponsibly joyous. Dr. Wilhelm Bode quotes these *Gedanken*, and no one who looks them up in his book² and reads them, however hastily, can fail to understand that

¹ The period was often called "genial" (Bohemian?) because it fostered and condoned the light-hearted pranks of these men and women of genius.

² *Das Vorgoethische Weimar*, p. 146 et seq.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Anna Amalia, though light-hearted, was not frivolous. But we also gather that she conceived it to be a kind of sacred duty with her to render people happy. Very great happiness had come to her. The early death of her sad young husband was a blow from which she recovered with comparative ease inasmuch as she had been left with a lovely child upon whom to lavish the rich affection of her nature. "Would that I might describe," she says, "the emotion which possessed me when I knew myself to be a mother! It was the purest as it was also the first joy of my life. So many new experiences then blessed me for the first time, too. My heart became lighter, my ideas clearer, and I grew to have more confidence in myself."

To bring up well this first child and the little brother who soon came to join him absorbed, however, all her courage and strength for the next fifteen years. Then she had to induct her elder son into his duties as ruler and help him through the ordeal of courtship and marriage. So it was not until the time when Goethe, full of life and vigour, first burst upon Weimar that Anna Amalia was free to give herself the long-deferred pleasure of making people happy. Here we find the secret of her zest for amusement and the secret, also, of her unfaltering friendship for her son's friend, the Frankfort

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

poet. Goethe was to share with her in the high mission of making pleasure an elevating pursuit!

Endowed though she was with the capriciousness and frivolity of the Brunswick blood, she had, also, a mind and a conscience. Her Confessions, already referred to, show that she perfectly knew herself to be in possession of that sensuous streak in her nature to which Schiller¹ took exception upon first meeting her. But she had every intention of controlling her sensuousness — and the young analyst showed himself lacking in penetration when he denied her high mental gifts. For besides being a musical composer and a tolerable judge of art she could — and did — read Aristophanes in Greek, and was able to discuss and enjoy the best Italian literature. Moreover, she had made a great success of her sons' education and had managed her kingdom with a talent bordering upon genius.

But she dearly loved fun, and poor Schiller, who had been starved on his social side, probably thought this a grievous fault in her. Not so Goethe. He could have nothing but admiration for a reigning Duchess of whom it had been written: "She is small in

¹ "I cannot like her physiognomy," he wrote to Körner. "Her intellect is extremely limited, nothing interests her but what is based on the sensuous; hence the taste she has, or affects to have, for music, painting and the rest. She is a composer herself, and has set Goethe's *Erwin und Elmire* to music. She speaks little; but has, at any rate, the merit of throwing aside all the stiffness of ceremony."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

stature, good-looking with a very *spirituelle* physiognomy; she has the Brunswick nose, lovely hands and feet, a light yet princely gait, speaks well but rapidly and has something amiable and fascinating in her nature. . . . This evening was a Redoute; tickets, one gulden (two francs) each. The Court arrived at eight. The Duchess was magnificent, *en domino*, and brilliant with jewels. She dances well, lightly and gracefully. The young princes, who were attired as *Zephyr* and *Amour*, also danced well. The masquerade was very full, lively and varied. A faro table was laid out; the smallest stake being half a gulden. The Duchess . . . played generously and lost. But as she was glad to dance she did not play long. She danced with every mask who invited her and stayed till nearly three o'clock, when almost every one had gone home." From the same writer¹ we get this account of another Redoute. "The Duchess appeared *en reine grecque*, a very beautiful costume which suited her well. The ball was very brilliant; some students from Jena were there. At the last ball of the season the Duchess sent me one of her own Savoyard dresses, and I was *frisé* and dressed like a woman by the Countess von Görtz's maid. The young Count was likewise

¹ An anonymous traveller quoted in *Geschichte der Deutschen Höfe*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 60.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.

DUCHESS ANNA AMALIA.

From a portrait by Tischbein now in the Wittumspalais, Weimar.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar

TIEFURT.

Anna Amalia's room is on the left, upstairs, (with three windows). The covered passage leads to the room of Fräulein von Göchhausen. Below on the right is the kitchen of the mock-feast.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSSES

dressed as a woman and we went to Court so, dined there, and drove thence to the ball, which lasted till six o'clock."

Dignities of state meant little and appealed not at all to Anna Amalia. For instance it was the most natural thing in the world for her to draw on, over her light gown, when caught out in a rainstorm, the greatcoat of one of the men in the party. What more sensible! Yet that is one of the things which is repeated about her to this day in Weimar. This particular escapade happened as she was driving to Tiefurt, her summer home from 1780 to 1807, and a place of particular interest to us because it is associated with all the more intimate quips and pranks of Anna Amalia's circle as well as with some of the most important theatrical performances of the day. Practical jokes were highly regarded at that era and there could be no better illustration of the difference between our feeling and theirs in such matters than may be found in the story of a joke once played at Tiefurt by Goethe and Karl August against Anna Amalia's deformed dwarf, the merry little Fräulein von Göchhausen. Our every instinct would forbid such a joke upon a woman — especially a deformed woman; but the Germans still seem to think the tale a funny one. It was repeated to me at Tiefurt last spring with every evidence of

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

appreciation. One night, as the crooked little woman came up the stairs leading to her bedroom her candle was blown out. But as she knew her way about as well in the dark as in the light she went cheerily on and, when she had reached the gallery into which her bedroom opened, began feeling confidently for the door. But no lock met her hand! Again and again she groped over the whole surface of the wall; but in vain. The door seemed to have entirely disappeared. In terror and confusion she descended to the Duchess's room but that good lady was fast asleep and her gentle knocking received no response. So again she climbed the staircase and groped fruitlessly for her door-knob. It was not until she was half frozen with cold and fear that the jokers deigned to explain that they — the Duke and Goethe — had removed her door and built up the wall in its place!

Another Tiefert prank is connected with a feast all the fruits and roasts and vegetables of which had been cunningly manufactured from wax and *papier maché*. The identical viands may still be seen in the huge Tiefert kitchen as fresh and inviting as on that long-ago day when they fooled the entire circle of Anna Amalia's dear friends.

Play-acting no less than practical joking had a place in the Tiefert programme. A number of inter-

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

esting theatrical performances are connected with happy days in this palace, the most famous being the production, in the summer of 1782,¹ by the dilettante actors who had been organized by Goethe and Anna Amalia, of the poet's dainty little operetta, *Die Fischerin*. The piece was given in the Tiefurt Park, partly on the bank of the Ilm near the bridge and partly on the Ilm itself, illuminated for the occasion with numerous torches and lamps. Huts of fishermen, surrounded by boats and the actual implements of the trade, were seen here and there among the lofty trees and on the hearth of Dorten (Corona Schröter) a bright fire burned. The better to see this and the fascinating reflections made by the torches of the fishermen, who were hunting up and down the river for the lost maiden, a large number of spectators crowded in the course of the evening upon one of the temporary wooden bridges and it gave way under the unaccustomed strain, precipitating them one and all into the water. But no one was hurt and the accident was gaily laughed off. Theirs was a *lustige Zeit*, indeed!

The production of *Die Fischerin* has peculiar interest for us because it marks the crisis of Frau von Stein's jealousy of Goethe and Corona Schröter. The poet had sent to his beloved lady the manu-

¹ The *Erl-König* was on this occasion heard for the first time.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

script of his piece but she would not acknowledge its receipt; nor would she go to see the operetta played, for then she must have applauded Corona, a thing which she had no mind at all to do. Salacious writers are wont blithely to declare that Goethe had a *liaison* with this charming singer whom he had first known in Leipzig during his student days and who, in 1776, came to Weimar under promise from the Court of four hundred thalers a year for life. I, however, agree with Lewes in thinking that Goethe and Corona were never anything more than good friends and I feel sure that it was the assurance of an income and not the presence of the poet which lured her to Karl August's capital. The daughter of a Frankfort musician, Corona, by virtue of her talents and excellent instruction, had already "arrived" as a concert-singer when Goethe was only a college student. She was tremendously admired both as an artist and as a woman but, up to the time when Goethe brought her to Weimar, had never acted. Frederica Oeser, who was one of her Leipzig friends, declared, "If she but decided to make the theatre her profession she would become one of our foremost actresses." But Corona seems to have known that the hardships of a professional stage career must prove too much for her strength, for she never made any move in that

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSSES

direction. None the less when the invitation to join the theatrical group at Weimar came she was glad to accept it for several reasons. Not only was the offer tempting from a financial standpoint but it gave her, also, an assured social position, and that, too, just when she knew that her voice was beginning to be too weak for successful public work.

Unfortunately the Duke soon evinced a decided *penchant* for the lovely singer and, had not Goethe intervened to prevent the matter from coming to a head, a *liaison* between Corona and Karl August might have resulted. As it was, however, we find Karl August pronouncing her "marble-beautiful, but marble-cold." I suspect that she was not cold to Goethe and I am rather inclined to agree with Keil in his opinion that, but for Charlotte von Stein, the mutual attraction between these two gifted beings might have resulted in marriage. Certain it is that about the time of the performance of *Iphigenia* at Ettersburg, some account of which has been given in a previous chapter, Goethe and Corona were much together. According to the entries in the poet's Day Book he was the singer's guest at dinner every day from August 27 (his birthday) until September 4 with the exception of one day when she was his guest. That evening, October 30, the two together went to Belvedere. "It was a surpass-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

ingly beautiful evening and night," we there read. One wonders if Corona was in Greek costume. She had taken to wearing an adaptation of Iphigenia's robes, after her great success in the part. Corona had many admirers among the men of the Court circle but she elected to go through life alone, very likely because she already felt in herself the germ of that illness which in 1801 caused her to withdraw to the pure air of Ilmenau. And there, a year later, she died, of the same dread disease which, five years earlier, had smitten down her pupil Christiane Neumann, the charming young girl to whose memory Goethe wrote his marvellous elegy *Euphrosyne*.¹ Goethe's undying tribute to Corona herself may be found in the poem which was written upon the death of the stage-manager Mieding.

Of the performance at Ettersburg in which Corona and Goethe so distinguished themselves there has been some description in a previous chapter but nothing was there said of the house itself, the scene of so many festive gatherings during Weimar's

¹ When Goethe assumed the directorship of the Weimar Court Theatre he found in the company Christiane Neumann, who, though then only thirteen, was mature far beyond her years. He taught her her first important rôle, that of Arthur in Shakespeare's *King John* — and had great difficulty, as he tells us in his memorial poem, in restraining himself from showing the deep love he felt for her. Christiane first played the part November 29, 1791. Soon afterwards Anna Amalia put her under the tutelage of Corona Schröter.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar

BELVEDERE TO - DAY.
See p. 334



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.

ETTERSBURG TO-DAY.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

Golden Age. Schloss Ettersburg, unlike Tiefurt, is still used as a summer retreat by the reigning royalties. But it is open to visitors when the ducal family is not in residence, and after a five-mile drive on a road which ascends steadily and is lined on both sides with magnificent trees trimmed into a semblance of hedge one finds oneself suddenly there. The site is the highest point in the vicinity of Weimar, and the castle itself stands in the midst of a thick game-stocked park.

Goethe made a pilgrimage here with Eckermann in the autumn of 1827, and it was somehow of the old man, revisiting the scenes of his youthful triumphs, that I chiefly thought during my own recent visit to the place. Eckermann had a beautiful time lecturing his chief upon bird-lore as their horse climbed slowly the long hill up to the castle. For "Goethe had observed in the hedges a number of birds and asked me if they were larks. 'Thou great and beloved one,' thought I, 'though thou hast investigated nature as few others have, in ornithology thou appearest a mere child. These are yellowhammers and sparrows,' returned I. . . . 'It is not in the nature of larks to settle upon bushes.'

"We were, meantime, continually going up-hill, and were now on the edge of a pine wood. We came

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

to a place where some stones had been broken and lay in a heap. Goethe ordered the coachman to stop and begged me to alight and see if I could discover any petrifications. I found some shells and also some broken ammonites, which I handed to him when I again took my seat. We drove on. 'Always the old story,' said Goethe, 'always the old bed of the sea. When one looks down from this height upon Weimar, and upon the numerous villages around, it seems wonderful to think that there was a time when whales sported in the broad valley below. And yet there was such a time — at least it is highly probable.'

"We were now upon the height and drove quickly along. On our right were oaks, beeches and other leafy trees. . . . 'This is a good resting-place,' said Goethe. 'I think we may as well try how a little breakfast would suit us in this superb air.'" The breakfast was accordingly unpacked and then, continues Eckermann, "we seated ourselves with our backs against the oak trees so that, as we ate, we had constantly before us the extensive view over half Thuringia. In the meantime we demolished a brace of roast partridges, with new white bread, and drank a flask of very good wine out of a cup of pure gold which Goethe always carried with him on such excursions in a yellow leather case.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

“ ‘ I have very often been in this spot,’ said he, ‘ and of late years I have thought that each would be the last time that I should look down hence on the kingdoms of the world and their glories.’ . . . We took another draught from the golden cup, and then drove round the northern side to the Ettersburg hunting-lodge. Goethe had all the chambers opened, which were hung with beautiful tapestry and pictures. He told me that Schiller had for some time inhabited the chamber at the western angle of the first story. ‘ In early times,’ continued he, ‘ we have here spent many a good day and wasted many a good day. We were all young and wanton. In the summer we had impromptu comedies and in the winter many a dance and sledge-race by torchlight.’ ”

“ We returned into the open air and Goethe led me, in a westerly direction, along a footpath into the wood. ‘ I will show you the beech,’ said he, ‘ on which we cut our names fifty years ago. But how it has altered and how everything has grown! That must be the tree; you see that it is still in the fullest vigour. . . . This beech then stood upon a dry open spot. It was quite sunny and pleasant around it, and here, in the beautiful summer evenings, we played our impromptu farces.’ ”

A picture which I saw at Ettersburg shows them giving one of these impromptu plays in the very

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

spot of which Goethe speaks. Their rôles were those of gypsies but Goethe and Anna Amalia are easily recognizable in spite of their disguise. Also to be seen in the castle is the scenery used when plays were given indoors. And a treasure which is preserved with particular care is the antler of a stag shot at Ettersburg by Goethe himself.

Belvedere, the third of the summer castles near Weimar associated with Anna Amalia and her circle, has also tender associations for the student of Weimar's *lustige Zeit*. It was to this castle that Anna Amalia came as a bride in 1756 and it remained her summer residence until 1776, when she resigned it to the bride Karl August was bringing home. Belvedere, like Tiefurt, is within easy walking distance of the town and is therefore a favourite resort of Weimarians on Sundays and holidays. For those who care not to walk there is a jolting automobile that runs at intervals from the Wieland Platz in the centre of the village and by means of this uncomfortable vehicle, hermetically sealed, though it was a perfect May afternoon, I arrived after twenty minutes of acute discomfort at the imposing old building erected about 1725 by Duke Ernest Augustus to be his summer castle. Here are orangeries and greenhouses well worth examining and a beautiful park and wood in which Goethe and his friends

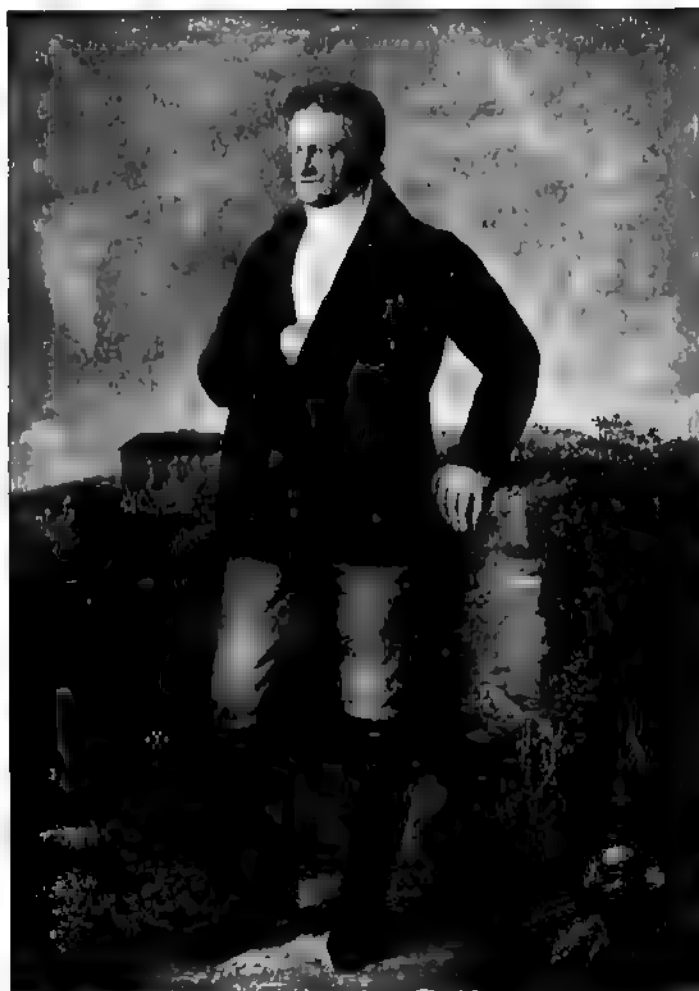
GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

often strolled. But no German thinks of visiting the house and its treasures until he has partaken in the cheerful fashion of the country of bitter coffee or foaming beer in the out-of-door restaurant under the spreading chestnut trees just over the way from the castle. In Anna Amalia's day there was no such accommodation for the common folk and the chance visitor. But I thought as I sipped my "glass" of tea (odious fashion of serving that queen of beverages!) under the trees in full bloom to the mixed accompaniment of song birds' carols and the clucking of domestic fowl that if she knows, she must be very glad that so many people annually make pleasure excursions to Tiefurt and to Belvedere all out of loving memory to the good times she instituted in those places.

And yet it is in the town-bound Wittumspalais (built by von Fritsch in 1767 and by him offered to the Duchess Anna Amalia for a winter home, when the castle burned in 1776) that one comes closest to this most lovable of duchesses. This residence is not in the least "palatial" though it is popularly so called. From the outside it looks like a gloomy and abandoned old warehouse. But within, one finds handsome square rooms tastefully equipped, after the best style of Anna Amalia's day, with a piano, inlaid tables and high-backed

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

furniture upholstered in rich brocades. Pictures reminiscent of the Dowager Duchess's happy months in Rome with Angelica Kauffman and her friends are everywhere, and many a trophy may be seen, too, of the good old days when Weimar's society, at its wisest and wittiest, assembled between these walls. For here for a number of years met the Friday Club organized by Goethe in 1791 for mutual improvement and social intercourse. The plan was for a gathering here on the first Friday of each month in winter of all the "intellectuals" of Weimar and Jena, for the purpose of discussing any phases of art, literature or science which might be considered to have a claim upon the interest of all. There was a delightful absence of stiffness or ceremony at the meetings, every one sitting wherever he happened to be near the large round table in the centre of the room upon which had been placed books and drawing instruments for use in illustrating the topic of the day. The meetings opened at five o'clock and closed at eight but, after the reading of the paper of the evening, everybody, including the Duke and his Duchess, who were always present, walked about a bit to rest themselves before settling down for the hour of discussion. Everything from Immortality to Goethe's Theory of Colours had a place among the subjects here considered.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.

KARL AUGUST.

From the painting by Ferdinand Jagemann, now in the Grand Ducal Library, Weimar.



THE EVENING CIRCLE AT ANNA AMALIA'S.
From a water colour by G. M. Kraus, in the Grand Ducal Library, Weimar.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESES

On less formal occasions Anna Amalia and her friends sat about this same hospitable table, doing whatever appealed to each, and once, as they were so passing a pleasant evening, the painter Kraus made a sketch of their circle. Thus after all these years we may look in upon the friendly group and see them just as they were, the Duchess painting; to her left the Englishman, Charles Gore, who appears to have been reading aloud, and is looking up over his spectacles at his hostess; then Elise Gore, also painting, while thinking, we doubt not, of Goethe, with whom she was a good deal in love. Emilie Gore, because of whom the Duchess Louise has suffered fierce pangs of jealousy, glances up from her stitching to examine the sketch which Herder is holding before her, and at her side is Fräulein Göchhausen, seemingly very busy with her sewing but probably planning a prank which shall outstrip Goethe's latest joke on her. On the other side of the table Heinrich Meyer leans to watch Goethe, who is very likely engaged on one of those drawings with false perspective to which he was so addicted; beyond them is Fräulein Wolfskeel, the Duchess's maid of honour, who appears to be making some saucy remark — perhaps she has noted the false perspective. The man nearest us is Einsiedel, that "faint heart" who, though he

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

made love to Corona Schröter for years, could never see his way, financially, to marriage with her. Corona herself is not in the picture.

One very sweet and intimate bond between Anna Amalia and Goethe during these middle-Weimar years was the warm friendship which the Duchess-mother had developed for Goethe's own dear mother. Some of the letters which passed between the two we have already met in the "Frau Aja" chapter, but at least a glimpse must here be given to the Duchess's side of the correspondence. Nothing that we know about Anna Amalia so warms our hearts to her as the kindly, cheerful letters which she sent for so many years to the lonely mother at Frankfort. Once, when Frau Aja had been worrying for fear that her dear Wolfgang would contract a heavy cold in his lightly built house on the Ilm, the Duchess writes:

"WEIMAR, 31 Nov. 1781.

"DEAREST FRAU AJA!—I am very pleased to be able to tell you that your darling Hätschelhans has graciously resolved to hire a house in the town. To be sure he will not move in before Easter, because the lease of the present tenant is not out until then; but meanwhile, dear mother, we have gained half the battle and it is well to have got so much.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

I have also promised to get some furniture because he is so very sweet and good. So please be so kind, dear mother, as to send me some patterns of chintz for chairs and sofas with the prices.

"Herr Gevatter [Gossip] Wieland is very proud of your remembering him so lovingly; he cried with much earnestness, 'That is the woman for me! She is the ornament of her sex!' and I said AMEN.

"I am sending you herewith a bundle of the Tiefert journals. This is a little sport which I invented this summer and which has succeeded so well that it still continues. Perhaps it will supply you, also, with some pleasant hours. The contributors are Hâtschelhans, Wieland, Herder, Knebel, Seckendorff and Einsiedel. The Frau Rath's world-renowned connoisseurship will enable her easily to guess the contributions of each author."

This triumph in the way of amateur journalism was made all in Tiefert and is found to be full of the wit and *camaraderie* which gave distinction to the life there. Yet that Anna Amalia found it not always easy to keep up to concert pitch in the matter of spirits we see from this little confession in one of her letters to Frau Aja. "When I am a bit blue I do as Frau Aja would, shake myself once or twice,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

and sit down to the clavier or draw; then my ideas are again *couleur de rose*."

After the death of Anna Amalia in 1807 it devolved upon the Duchess, Karl August's consort, to sustain the distinction which her gifted mother-in-law had given to the Court of Weimar. And though she was by no means the older woman's equal either in activity of mind or in discrimination of taste she discharged with rather surprising ease and grace the added duties which now fell to her lot.

Goethe speaks always of this Duchess — Louise of Darmstadt — as an "angel," and it appears to have been a fact that she was a creature almost too bright and good "for human nature's daily food," such human nature, at any rate, as was to be found in Weimar at the period of its great literary glory. Born at Berlin in 1757, the youngest of five sisters, all of whom were closely chaperoned by an excellent and highly virtuous mother, her transplanting, away from all her family, into the rather too-easy-going society of Weimar seems almost to have frozen the never too genial current of her young soul. Her aloofness gave her the air of sitting in judgment, and this, naturally, did not tend to increase her popularity either with Karl August or with his frivolous playmates. And so, feeling herself to be "misunderstood," she withdrew further and further into

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESES

her shell of reserve. But Goethe, with his extraordinary genius for comprehending woman's nature, grasped intuitively the fact that it was not because Louise felt herself to be better than the other women at Weimar but because she actually *was* better than most of them that she could not be happy in their society. Her husband's unpolished manners and easy moral code did not help the matter any, and, while Goethe could not be blamed for the former, he knew that he was blamed — and somewhat justly, too — for the latter. Consequently we soon find him giving paternal advice to Karl August — with the Duchess's greater happiness in mind — and bearing himself quite humbly before her stern disapproval. Later, when she came to know the poet better and to estimate more justly his very remarkable qualities, she felt real esteem for him.

Little echoes of the domestic jars between the ducal pair which the poet was called upon to adjust may be found in Goethe's letters of the period. For instance, we find him giving expression to a piece of wisdom many married couples might do well to assimilate, apropos of her strenuous demand, on one occasion, that Karl August should immediately lead out of the room a favourite dog which he had brought in with him. The Duke was wrong to

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

bring the dog in, declared the poet; but after he had brought him in Louise was wrong to make a scene about it. Louise made a good many scenes early in her married life. She was cold, reserved and dignified, while Karl August was ardent, impulsive and as full as his mother had been of impatience in the face of hampering conventions. And he was most unrepentful. Goethe once said of him, "How very restless he is! He can neither sit still himself nor let any one else sit still." A husband of this temperament could not fail to be exceedingly trying to Louise's calm and self-contained nature.

Then there were jealousies to make the relations between husband and wife even more strained. Mention has already been made of Karl August's *penchant* for Corona Schröter, in whose interest Goethe interfered, but there was another actress, Caroline Jagemann, about whom the poet could do nothing but suffer in silence. As theatre-director Goethe was called upon to bear a good deal, after the Duke had taken the Jagemann under his protection; but there finally came an issue which proved too much for his patience and he at once resigned. The cause of the trouble was a performing dog and there is reason to believe that the actress made the question of the poodle's appearance upon the boards of the Weimar theatre to seem of far

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

greater importance to Karl August than it would otherwise have been. She knew that Goethe would not brook any such lowering of the dignity of the stage as such a performance implied — and so egged on Karl August, who was a passionate lover of dogs, to assert his authority over Goethe's and insist upon having the exhibition permission for which the poet had already refused. As a result Goethe found himself practically turned out of the office for which he had done so much. In due time the matter was adjusted, of course, because Karl August really deeply loved his poet, but it had been a very trying episode.

Yet it had one good effect — that of ranging Goethe even more definitely than he had been before on the side of Louise, who knew the Jagemann for her rival. To be sure the Duchess never showed in public any resentment against the lady. On one occasion, indeed, she conspicuously complimented her at a Court gathering for the exquisite way in which she had rendered a beautiful song. The attitude of Louise towards this woman who had supplanted her in her husband's affections was — in more aspects than one — extraordinary. When physicians had assured her that she could never again hope to bear children she, with her own hand, wrote Fräulein Jagemann a letter begging

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

her to accept the appointment of mistress to the Duke! In 1809, the lady was made Baroness von Heygendorff by the Duke, and in 1812 took up her abode in the house where Anna Amalia had died, five years before. In after years children of the two families gambolled pleasantly together and we find Louise writing thus, in 1817, to her brother at Darmstadt:

“ Vous verrez arriver un de ces jours un jeune Heygendorff, l'aîné de la progéniture gauche du Duc, votre beau-frère, qu'il envoie en Suisse et qui doit vous être présenté.”

The brother appears to have expressed surprise at this announcement for she then explained:

“ Vous vous étonnez et ébahissez du nom de Heygendorff, qui n'est pourtant ni frappant ni extraordinaire; je vous donne de la part du Duc, votre beau-frère, des éclaircissements et renseignements là-dessus. Le nom de Heygendorff est celui d'une terre près de Allstedt, qui appartenait à une famille de Geusau, et qui est retombée au Duc à la mort du dernier propriétaire. Celui l'a donnée à la Jagemann et à ses enfants et a fort bien fait, car il y a devoir et justice d'avoir soin de sa progéniture. Je suppose que le prince sera content de cette explication.”¹

¹ Quoted in *Louise, Grossherzogin von Sachsen-Weimar*, by Eleonore von Bojanowski, Berlin, 1905.

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESES

Although Louise and Charlotte von Stein were intimate and devoted friends the Duchess did not resent, as Charlotte did, the coming of Christiane into Goethe's life. In fact she grew very mellow and very generous as the years passed by, acting evidently on the ethical principle Tolstoi has since summed up in the terse counsel, "Stop trying to make other people good and be good yourself."

It was undoubtedly to the Duchess Louise that Weimar owed its preservation from destruction at the hands of Napoleon and his minions. For when the Conqueror came sweeping down upon Germany, in the autumn of 1806, the famous little city seemed doomed for the sword and arrangements were hastily made for removing the Duchess-mother and other members of the royal household from the scene of danger. But Louise never for a moment thought of fleeing herself. Cannon-balls fell in the city, the wounded and dead filled the streets and on all sides destruction and pillage were going on. Fire, too, broke out near the castle, the flames even casting their red glare into the Duchess's apartments while she, who had there resolved to stay, heard from all sides cries of distress mingled with the wild riot of drunken soldiery.

Then after twenty-four hours of fearful expectation Napoleon himself entered the town, coming

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

straight to the apartments under her very roof which his servitors had seized and made ready for him. Pale but with a dignity which never forsook her Louise descended the grand staircase to meet him. As she approached Napoleon regarded her with marked hostility and in a loud voice demanded,

“ Who are you, madame? ”

“ The Duchess of Weimar! ” she quietly replied.

“ I am sorry for you, madame, ” said the Emperor, coldly, “ but I must crush your husband. ” Then, turning abruptly away, he called out rudely, “ Let dinner be got ready for me in my own apartments. ”

The night was spent by the soldiery in all the horrid excesses of rapine and no inhabitant, however aged or distinguished, was free from assault. The rooms of Kraus the painter, for instance, were broken into quite ruthlessly, everything in them rifled and destroyed, and the old gentleman (he was then over seventy) commanded to pluck some fowls which the soldiers had found downstairs. He very placidly complied, they deriding him the while. But when he rose to fetch his spectacles they knocked him down and beat him so cruelly that he died. Yet Louise and her little group of female attendants stayed on in the palace. Next morning word was sent to Napoleon that the Duchess of Weimar

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

requested an interview. The great man, to whom sleep had brought the saving reflection that he was a monarch as well as a general and so could not well continue to bully a duchess who was pretty into the bargain, returned a gracious answer and invited himself to breakfast in the lady's apartment.

On his entrance he began instantly with a question, — his favourite mode of address, — "How could your husband, madame, be so mad as to make war against me?"

"Your majesty would have despised him if he had not," was the well-nigh inspired answer.

"How so?" came the next question but with much less gruffness than before.

"My husband has been in the service of the King of Prussia upwards of thirty years," answered Louise, "and surely it was not when the King had so mighty an opponent as you to face that the Duke could abandon him."

Such a reply was irresistible and soon Louise and the Emperor were talking of the business at hand in quite a human fashion, Napoleon the while becoming so greatly impressed with her noble qualities that he at length broke out, "Madame, vous êtes la femme la plus respectable que j'ai jamais connue: vous avez sauvé votre mari."

How deep and sincere was Napoleon's admiration

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

may be seen from a remark he subsequently made to General Rapp: "Voilà une femme qu'avec nos deux cent canons nous n'avons pas pu faire trembler!" And to the Weimar deputies he said, a few weeks afterwards, "You possess the ornament of German princesses; whatever I may do for the country or for the Duke is done solely for her sake. Her conduct ought to serve as a model for every throne in Europe; never did I see woman of truer moral dignity!"

He seems to have cherished this opinion for several years, too. For in 1813, a few days before the battle of Lützen, he made her a visit and, because of her intercession, instantly released two persons in the service of Weimar who had been imprisoned.

Like all modest people the Duchess Louise shrank from public notice of what she had done on this occasion for her husband and his Duchy, and once when the return of October 14 was marked by a tasteful medal bearing her head and the inscription "Das Gerettete Weimar," surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves, she wrote to Goethe "that a very simple incident had been made of too great importance, for it had arisen quite naturally out of the events of the time."

But Karl August knew how much he owed to his wife and he never failed, after her historic encounter

GOETHE'S TWO DUCHESSES

with Napoleon, to value her justly. When the treaty which secured the nominal independence of Weimar and declared its territory to be a part of the Rhenish League was brought from Bonaparte to the Duke by a French general, he refused to take it into his own hands, saying, "Give it to my wife; the Emperor intended it for her."

CHAPTER XIII

BETTINA

LETTERS so full as Bettina Brentano's, of wild fancies, poetical descriptions and burning declarations of love, were never written — before or since — by man to woman or woman to man. They could not be, for they are letters of a gifted child — or so, at any rate, we must believe while reading them — to the great poet Goethe whom the child adored. And this is the key to the wonders of the correspondence.

Of course, there will always be people to talk in shocked whispers of the "impropriety" of Bettina's behaviour; but I am inclined to agree with that whimsical essay in a long-ago *Blackwood's* wherein it was maintained that, while such conduct would have been very improper in them (the critics) "in Bettina Brentano it was as beautiful, graceful and free from impropriety as the morning and evening walks of Paul and Virginia.

"In the summer of 1807," this essay goes on to say, "there lived in Frankfort a little girl of four-

BETTINA

teen or fifteen years of age, very small in stature and so light and dancing in her movements that she might have passed for an attendant of Queen Titania; but in her deep black eyes there was a sort of light that the fairies have not yet arrived at — and her voice was musical, her lips rosy. Everywhere she was known as the cleverest little girl that ever was seen, either in fairyland or Frankfort, or anywhere else. Now there dwelt in the same town a majestic woman — strong-minded, tender-hearted — and with talent enough to compensate for the stupidity of all the other old women (male and female) in Frankfort. Her name was Madame Goethe and she was seventy-five years old and lived in an old house by herself. Bettina went to her . . . with her heart yearning for somebody to make a friend of, and sat down on a stool at the old lady's feet and said, 'Will you be my friend?' And the old lady was delighted and kissed her; and Bettina sat at her feet day after day, from that time forth; and they were the two tenderest friends in Germany. And a pleasant thing it would have been to be a mouse in the wall and to hear such conversation as was carried on by the two."

For always the sweet old lady and the eager little girl talked of a boy who had been born in Frankfort in 1749 — so many years before that the child, at

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

least, did not realize that this "boy" was now a man of almost sixty summers, with hair that was here and there white. She pictured him as always young, indeed, and so was nearly beside herself with joy when her brother-in-law offered to take her as companion to his wife, in a journey he was forced to make to Berlin, and afterwards to Weimar. The country was at that time the seat of war and the ladies, for their protection, disguised themselves in men's clothes. Bettina sat on the box the whole time — passing as a little tiger at the inns where they stopped for the night — and making herself generally useful around the horses when there was harnessing and unharnessing to be done. So after a week of hard travelling she arrived at the literary capital of Germany, the home of her hero, Goethe.

But she did not present herself to the poet in the garb of a little postboy. Hastily changing her dress, she sought out her relation, Wieland, and from him secured the following note, as delicious a letter of introduction as was ever written, I think:

"Bettina Brentano, Sophia's sister, Maximiliane's daughter, Sophia La Roche's granddaughter, wishes, dear brother, to see you; says she fears you and that this little note will be a talisman of courage to her. Although I am tolerably certain she makes game of

BETTINA

me, yet I must do what she asks, and shall wonder much if you are not compelled to do the same.

“W.”

Armed with this passport to the beloved presence Bettina set forth, and then occurred the historic encounter of which she promptly wrote to the dear old lady back in Frankfort:

“The door opened and there he stood, solemnly grave, and looked with fixed eyes upon me. I stretched my hands towards him, — I believe. I soon lost all consciousness. — Goethe caught me quickly to his heart. ‘Poor child, have I frightened you?’ These were the first words with which his voice penetrated to my heart; he led me into his room and placed me on the sofa opposite to him. There we were, both mute; at last he broke the silence: ‘You have doubtless read in the papers that we suffered a great loss, a few days ago, by the death of the Duchess Amalia?’ ‘Ah,’ said I, ‘I don’t read the papers.’ — ‘Indeed? I had believed that everything which happens in Weimar would have interested you.’ ‘No, nothing interests me but you alone; and I am far too impatient to pore over newspapers.’ ‘You are a kind child.’ — A long pause, — I fixed to that tiresome sofa in such anxiety. You know how hard it is for me to sit

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

still in such a well bred manner. Ah, mother, is it possible so far to forget oneself? I suddenly said, 'Can't stay here upon the sofa,' and sprang up. 'Well,' said he, 'make yourself at home.' Then I flew to his neck, — he drew me on his knee and locked me to his heart. Still, quite still it was, — everything vanished. I had not slept for so long, — years had passed in sighing after him. I fell asleep on his breast; and when I awoke I began a new life."

We have to remember, as we read this and subsequent descriptions of Bettina's encounters with Goethe that her book is considerably more fiction than fact. That Goethe wrote letters to her is undeniable — I have seen some of them myself — and no one doubts for a minute that she often poured out her soul in missives to him. But just as *Werther* is a fictional treatment of what had much basis in fact so the *Correspondence with a Child* poetically elaborates and otherwise manipulates Goethe's rather commonplace letters to the girl with whose mother he had once been in love. Frau Aja, to whom most of the letters about the poet are addressed, perfectly understood the nature of her little correspondent and, when Bettina had been too extravagant, called her to order thus roundly:

"Hey! child, thou art bewitched! What fancies hast thou taken into thy head? Why, who is thy

BETTINA

'beloved,' who is to think of thee by night and by moonshine, too? He! Your humble servant! I tell thee, again, put things in order; write connected letters in which there is something to read. Write of all that happens, orderly, one thing after another. First, who is there, how you like them and how they are dressed; whether the sun shines or whether it rains; for that is, also, to the purpose." In reply to which rather imperious request Goethe's mother got the following:

"I shall never be wise. How should I attain to wisdom? My lonely life does not lead to it. What have I seen and heard this year? In winter, I was sick; then I made a magic lantern of pasteboard, where the cat and the knight had the principal parts; I studied the part of the cat for nearly six weeks, but she was no philosopher, or I might have profited something. In spring the orange-tree blossomed in my chamber; I had a table and a seat made around it, and there, in its sweet-scented shade, I wrote to my friend; that was a joy for which no wisdom would have recompensed me. In the mirror opposite I saw the tree reflected and the sunbeams streaming through its foliage; there, too, I saw her, the presumptuous brunette, sitting to write to the greatest poet, — to the exalted above all men. In April I went out early upon the ramparts and sought

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

the first violet and botanized; in May I learned to drive a pair of horses; in the morning I drove by sunrise to Oberrad, walked in the potato-fields and helped the gardener to plant; with the milk-woman I laid out a carnation-bed, — the deep-red carnations are my favourite flowers. In such a way of life, what can I learn, or how become wise? What I write to your son pleases him;¹ he always desires more, and that makes me blessed; for I revel in an abundance of thoughts, which refreshingly express to him my love, my happiness. What, then, are talent and wisdom, since I, the most blessed, do not want them?

“It was last year, in the beginning of May, that I saw him for the first time. He broke off a young leaf from the vine which grew around his window and laid it on my cheek, saying ‘This leaf and thy cheek are both downy.’ I sat upon the stool at his feet and leaned upon him while the time passed in silence. Now, what of wisdom could we have spoken to one another which would not have detracted from this unrevealed bliss? What words of genius could have repaid that quiet peace which bloomed within us? . . .

¹ He wrote her, on November 3, 1809, “Your letters give me great pleasure; they remind me of a time when I was, perhaps, as foolish as you, but certainly happier and better than I am now.”

BETTINA

"How bright is this night! The hills with their vines clothed in splendour lie there, and sleepily suck the nourishing moonlight. Write soon; I have no one in whom I so willingly confide; for I know you are not united to nor reserve yourself for any one more than me, and that you never talk about me to another. If you only knew how far in the night it is! The moon is setting; that grieves me."

What though Bettina *was* twenty-two (instead of fifteen as she represents herself in the *Correspondence*) and what though Goethe *was* fifty-eight? He was very glad to receive fresh, sparkling letters from the engaging maiden whose love and light-hearted chat had so greatly added to his mother's joy in life. Had Bettina kept within bounds, indeed, their pleasant relations would probably never have lapsed. For though he could not tell whether to call his little friend *wunderbar* or *wunderlich*, "wonderful" or "odd," he all the while vastly enjoyed her wit and her wayward fancies. At length, however, that occurred which impelled him to call her a nuisance — and no more letters passed between them.

Bettina's first visit to Weimar followed close upon the death of the Duchess Amalia; this part of her letter is true, — the single true thing in all that rapturous description. Riemer, the old and trusted friend of Goethe, who was living in the poet's house

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

at this very time, records that Bettina complained bitterly to him of Goethe's *coldness*. Which does not look much as if she *often* went to sleep in the poet's lap! Riemer, indeed, insists that it was only with the greatest difficulty that Goethe could restrain his impatience at the boresome adoration of this woman who though she looked like a little girl could not bear to be snubbed and reproved as one would snub a troublesome child. Between this visit, which was the first, and the next visit, which was the last, Goethe and Bettina conducted a more or less desultory correspondence. Her missives probably continued to be effusive while his were carefully kind. One of his, which I have seen, thanks Bettina in a most unimpassioned manner for a box of things she has sent him and refers in a perfectly commonplace way to a picture of Albrecht Dürer which she appears to have dispatched to him and the receipt of which he had not promptly acknowledged. The date of this letter is February, 1810; but the corresponding letter in Bettina's book is given over to fervid praise of her and to a discussion by the poet of the emotions which inspired *Elective Affinities*!

Bettina, it should here be explained, regarded herself as the original of Ottilie in that remarkable novel and so frankly appropriated to her own vanity

BETTINA

and for her own book the extraordinary sonnets¹ in which Goethe had poured out his passion for Minna Herzlieb. But even if one were disposed to explain away, as a natural mistake, this offence against literary ethics, it would not be possible to find any such excuse for the "Child's" later claims to poems known by Riemer to have been written in 1813-19, years during which she was the wife of Achim von Arnim and was most emphatically a *persona non grata* in Goethe's house. The explanation of this latter fact is not a pretty story. In April, 1811, Bettina, aged twenty-six (and therefore quite old enough to be held responsible for her impertinences and vagaries), came with her young husband to make a visit to the Goethes. One day, according to Lewes, she and Goethe's wife went together to the Exhibition of Art, in which the poet took great interest. Bettina there indulged in some satirical remarks about German painters in general and about Heinrich Meyer in particular and her words aroused the wrath of Christiane, who was a

¹ The key to these is in the following lines:

"Zwei Worte sind es, kurz, bequem zu sagen,
Die wir so oft mit holder Freude nennen,
Doch keineswegs die Dinge deutlich kennen
Wovon sie eigentlich den Stempel tragen." (*Herr-Lieb.*)

Moriz Carriere says that Bettina thought *Abendlicht* to be the answer because Goethe had often called her the "light of his life's evening."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

warm friend of Meyer's. Both women proceeded to abuse each other in most unladylike fashion and when Goethe, later, took the side of his wife, as he was bound to do, Bettina had to leave in haste the house on the Frauenplan. That she bore no malice, however, is shown by the fact that she later made every possible effort to promote the erection in Frankfort of a memorial to the poet, whose death (in 1832), closely following that of her beloved husband, left her bereft indeed. It was, we are told, to give herself an occupation and a refuge from her grief, that she constructed the book which immediately made her famous.

But is it not a pity that no literary adviser was at hand to counsel that she preface the volume by an explanation of its fictitious nature? As it is, one quite properly resents the fact that she declares herself to have been entertained by Goethe in Weimar at a date when we know him to have been in Bohemia and that she makes Frau Aja write several flippant letters some weeks after her death. Yet, when all is said, there are many passages in Bettina's much-maligned book which the world would be vastly the poorer without. We know, for instance, that her accounts of what happened when the great lioness, Madame de Staël, came to Mainz and to Frankfort are fairly veracious; and nowhere are

BETTINA

there extant more interesting passages about Goethe and his circle. The "Child" was amusingly jealous of the famous authoress and, to detract from the esteem in which Goethe might hold the visitor, described in most entertaining fashion her own encounter with her at Mainz, hoping, we have no doubt, that Frau Aja would send the letter on to her son.

"No lady would undertake to sit next her [at supper]," she declares, "so I sat myself beside her and uncomfortable enough it was. The gentlemen stood round the table, and planted themselves all behind us, pressing one upon the other, only to speak with or look at her. They leaned quite over me and I said in French, 'Your adorers quite suffocate me;' at which she laughed. She said that Goethe had spoken to her of me and I remained sitting for I would fain have heard what he said; and yet I was vexed, for I would rather he should speak to no one of me; nor do I believe he did, — she only said so. There came at last so many who all wanted to speak with her across and over me, that I could endure it no longer and said, 'Your laurels press too heavily upon my shoulders;' upon which I got up and made my way through her admirers. Then Sismondi, her companion, came and kissed my hand and said I had much talent; this he told over to the

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

rest and they repeated it at least twenty times as if I had been a prince, from whom everything sounds clever be it never so commonplace. I afterwards listened to her while she was speaking of Goethe; she said she had expected to see a second Werther, but was mistaken, for neither his manners nor person answered the character, and she lamented much that there was nothing of Werther about him. . . . Be under no uneasiness about your French, Frau Rath; converse with her in the finger language and make commentaries with your large eyes; that will astonish her. Madame de Staël has a whole ant-hill of thoughts in her head, and what can one have to say to *her?* "

That the Frau Rath did not in the least enjoy being run after by Madame de Staël we have seen from one of her own letters. It is, therefore, very entertaining to follow the piquant description, which Bettina sent Goethe, of his mother's reception of the visiting celebrity in the apartments of Morris Bethman at Frankfort: "Whether out of irony or fun," she begins, "your mother had decorated herself wonderfully, but with French humour and not in French taste. I must tell you that when I looked at her with three feathers upon her head, which nodded on three different sides, — one red, one white and one blue, — the French national

BETTINA

colours, rising from out a field of sunflowers, my heart beat with joy and expectation. She was deeply rouged and her great black eyes fired a burst of artillery. Round her neck she wore the celebrated gold ornaments given her by the queen of Prussia. Lace of ancient fashion and great splendour (a complete heirloom) covered her bosom and thus she stood with her white kid gloves; in one hand, a curiously wrought fan with which she set the air in motion, the other hand, which was bared, quite covered with sparkling stones, taking from time to time a pinch out of a golden snuff box in which was set a miniature of you; where, with powdered ringlets, you are thoughtfully leaning your head upon your hand.

“ The party of distinguished elder ladies formed a semi-circle in Morris Bethman's bed-chamber; on the purple-coloured carpet, in the centre of which was a white field with a leopard. The company looked imposingly stately. On the walls were ranged beautiful Indian plants, and the apartment was lighted by shaded glass globes; opposite the semi-circle stood the bed, upon a dais of two steps, also covered with a purple tapestry, on each side a candelabra. I said to your mother, ‘ Madame de Staël will think she is cited before the court of love, for the bed yonder looks like the covered throne

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

of Venus.' It was thought that then she might have much to answer for.

"At last the long-expected one came through a suite of lighted apartments, accompanied by Benjamin Constant. She was dressed as Corinne, a turban of aurora and orange-coloured silk, a dress of the same with an orange tunic girded so high as to leave little room for her heart; her black brows and lashes glittered, as also her lips with a mysterious red; her long gloves were drawn down, covering only her hand, in which she held the well-known laurel sprig. As the apartment where she was expected lies much lower she was obliged to descend four steps. Unfortunately, she held up her dress before instead of behind and this gave the solemnity of her reception a terrible blow; it looked very odd as, clad in complete Oriental style, she marched down towards the stiff dames of the virtue-enrolled Frankfort society.

"Your mother darted a few daring glances at me, whilst they were presented to each other. I had stationed myself apart to observe the whole scene. I perceived Madame de Staël's astonishment at the remarkable decorations and dress of your mother, who displayed an immense pride. She spread out her robe with her left hand; with her right, she saluted, playing with her fan, and



MADAME DE STAËL.
From the painting by Gerard.



BETTINA VON ARNIM.
From a drawing by Schmeidler.



THE CHILD BETTINA.

BETTINA

bowing her head several times with great condescension as she said, with an elevated voice, '*Je suis la mère de Goethe.*' '*Ah, je suis charmée,*' answered the authoress, and a solemn stillness followed. Then ensued the presentation of her distinguished suite — William Schlegel, Sismondi and Benjamin Constant, — also curious to become acquainted with Goethe's mother. Your mother answered their civilities with a New Year's wish in French, which, with solemn courtesies, she kept murmuring between her teeth; in short I think the audience was perfect and gave a fine specimen of the German *grandezza*. Soon your mother beckoned me to her; I was forced to play the interpreter between both; then the conversation turned only upon you and your youth; the portrait upon the snuff-box was examined; it was painted at Leipzig, before you were so ill, but already very thin; one can nevertheless recognize all your present grandeur in those gracious features, and above all the author of *Werther*. Madame de Staël spoke about your letters and that she would like to read what you wrote your mother, and your mother promised them to her; I thought, she should surely get none of your letters to read from me for I bear her a grudge; as often as your name dropped from her not well-formed lips an inward wrath fell upon me. She

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

told me that in your letters you call her *amie* . . . how can you be friendly with so unpleasant a countenance? ”

As a matter of fact Goethe was not particularly friendly with the Genevese maker of epigrams; the unpleasantness of her countenance may have been one reason why. Another reason was that she had invaded Weimar and bade him “ look pleasant ” at a time when he found it particularly difficult to be his usual sunny self. Napoleon, bored beyond endurance by the conversational attentions and political activities of this remarkable woman, had banished her from Paris; whereupon she merely crossed the Rhine, and establishing herself in the Athens of Germany, sent to Goethe — who was at Jena — news that she wished to see him. He replied, “ She comes at a time¹ which, to me, is the most annoying of the whole year; a time at which I understand very well why Henry III should have sent for the Duke of Guise, merely because it was fatal weather, a time at which I envy Herder when I hear that he is buried.”

At first he flat-footedly declared that his health would not admit of his coming to Weimar. He added, however, that, if Madame de Staël wished very much to meet him she could come to Jena and

¹ December, 1804.

BETTINA

he would see that she had a comfortable lodging and sufficient food at a *bourgeoisie* table. Then, every day, when his business in connection with the university was over, they could have some hours of conversation.

But when it came to the point of bringing the lady over the bad roads between Weimar and Jena for the purpose of visiting him Goethe repented, returned to his home, and on December 24 gave a little dinner party for Madame de Staël and the Schillers. Schiller enjoyed the evening much more than did his host. Of all the creatures he had ever seen, he pronounced Madame de Staël "the most talkative, the most combative, the most gesticulative. She insists on explaining everything," he had previously told Goethe; "on understanding everything; measuring everything. She admits of no darkness; nothing Incommensurable; and where her torch throws no light nothing can exist. Hence her horror of the Ideal Philosophy, which she thinks leads to mysticism and superstition. Nor has she any sense of what we call poetry; she can only appreciate what is passionate, rhetorical, universal. She does not prize what is false; but she often fails to perceive what is true."

Such a woman would be abhorrent to Goethe's whole nature. While he might, when roused, or,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

as she unpleasantly puts it, "under champagne," meet her witticisms with brilliancies of his own, he could not really like her, and, with him, to like a person was absolutely necessary if he were to prove himself likable. There was a particular reason, too, for his coldness in this lady's presence of which we to-day know, as she could not. There had just been published a correspondence, between Rousseau and two women who had addressed themselves to him as admirers, in which the Frenchman appeared to exceedingly poor advantage. And, as Madame de Staël had told Goethe she expected to print his conversation, he had been seized with a panic lest he be painted as unflatteringly as poor Rousseau had been. What she did print is as follows:¹ "At first we are astonished to find coldness and even something like stiffness in the author of *Werther*; if he were a Frenchman he would be made to talk from morning till night. For he possesses superior talents for conversation and, whatever we may say, superior talents ought to enable a man to talk. Goethe is inclined to be more bitter than sweet. Though that resistless ardour which in-

¹ She, also, attributed to him "*dédain du succès*." This he categorically denies in a letter sent from Weimar to Frederic Rochlitz in 1812: "If she means instantaneous vehement success," he says, "she is certainly correct. But as concerns true effect I am by no means indifferent,—on the contrary, my belief therein has been my guiding star in all my works."

BETTINA

spired him in the composition of *Werther* is his no longer the warmth of his imagination is still sufficient to animate everything. . . . But his writings produced a more lively impression while he still bore a part in the active scenes of the passions — while he suffered in his own person from the perturbations of the heart."

There we have it! Goethe's great offence in the eyes of Madame de Staël was that he did not fall in love with her. Throughout the two months which she spent at Weimar, during this first visit, she regularly laid siege to him and, when he failed to respond to her advances, commented pointedly on his "*rotondité*," undeterred by the fact that she was by no means a sylph herself. Crabb Robinson, who was at Weimar that winter and so often encountered Madame de Staël in society, tells us that he once rebuked her with the words: "Madame, vous n'avez pas compris Goethe and vous ne le comprendrez jamais." To which she replied, with flashing eyes, as she stretched out her fine arm, of which she was justly vain, "Monsieur, je comprends tout ce qui mérite d'être compris; ce que je ne comprends n'est rien."

In the regrettable breach between the Goethes and the Von Arnims the Weimar ladies sided with the pert little baroness and long refused to forgive

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Goethe for taking the part of the "globular form of the *Frau Geheimrätthin*" (one of Charlotte Schiller's expressions!) in the quarrel. Not until eight years after Christiane's death, however, did Goethe again make Bettina welcome at Weimar. She then came (1824) to show him a monument designed for his honour and he spoke about it very kindly, we are told, — much more kindly, indeed, than the work merited as art. It is interesting to add that the last stranger whom Goethe entertained as his guest was Bettina's eldest son,¹ the last words he ever wrote, some verses in the album of this young friend. How curiously the poet's life seems to have been bound up with that of this family!

Bettina's letters, when published in Germany, brought her immense literary fame and seven thousand dollars. This sum she decided to devote to the erection of a Goethe monument made after the design he had seen and praised, but finding that seven thousand dollars would not be enough to execute the work properly, she determined to supplement this sum with profits from an English translation of the book. Accordingly she spent all that the work had thus far earned upon the printing and binding of ten thousand copies for the English public. The translation she laboriously performed

¹ She had four sons and three daughters.

BETTINA

herself with the aid, as she tells us, of a Johnson dictionary. She was so confident that Goethe's English admirers would hasten to buy her volumes that she started her ten thousand copies to the Longmans in London without any publisher's agreement as to handling the work. Then she sat down and waited for returns on her venture. When months had passed and nothing came she began to investigate, with the result that her ten thousand volumes were discovered to be standing in the Custom House, an immense bill for charges having meanwhile accumulated on them. And since no English buying public could be found for her strange mixture of fiction and fact the entire edition was finally sold as "stock" to pay the heavy costs which had accumulated.

It happened, however, that one copy of this ill-starred edition found its way to America. In it is preserved Bettina's own design for the Goethe monument, and a writer¹ who there saw the sketch describes it thus: "Jupiter Tonans seems to have been the model for the gigantic creature who sits, half draped, in a huge arm-chair, with wreaths on his head and in his hands, while in classical nudity the youthful Psyche leans on his knee, clasping in a pair of very thin arms, his lyre — to reach which

¹ M. E. W. Sherwood, in *Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1873.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

she stands painfully on tiptoe." One is quite reconciled after reading this to the non-execution of the work. An American edition of Bettina's English translation was published by Ticknor and Fields in 1859¹ at which time enthusiasm over things Germanic was at its height in and about Boston.

One Bostonian who had greatly contributed towards a cordial reception for this American edition was Theodore Parker, who, during his trip to Europe in 1844, called on Bettina at Berlin and held with her a very remarkable conversation. After reading in the German *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, Parker had commented thus:²

"An astounding book, — beginning, middling, and ending a mystery. What did the creature wish of Goethe? Not to be his wife, — for he had one, at least at the time. . . . Bettina is one of the queerest of girls, as well as one of the wisest and deepest and highest." Five years later he met her and had an interview which he thus reports:³

"A little woman, about sixty. She must once have been handsome; her face is full of expression, her smile beautiful. Hand quite long, nails long

¹ Our quotations from the work follow this edition. Its curious but often attractive English is Bettina's own.

² In Parker's Journal of 1839. His observations written at the same time on Goethe's character were most severe.

³ Quoted in Sanborn's *Recollections of Seventy Years*; Vol. II, p. 551.

BETTINA

and dirty; her attire shabby, the room a little disarranged. I gave the letter [of introduction] to the porter. Presently she came; said she did not speak English. . . . Asked if the men did not tyrannize over the women in America? I told her no, but the tyranny was on the other side.

"She has many letters from all parts and was pleased when I told her that her books were much read in America. . . . She spoke of the affairs of Silesia; said that 70,000 men were there suffering for want, almost in a state of famishing. Still there was bread enough in the land, — but the rich landholders crushed the people, and the king did them no good. He was religious; built a cathedral that cost a million thalers. . . .

"She had complained that there is no courage in Deutschland. I told her if the men lacked it she had enough; that she had the courage of a Jewish prophet and the inspiration of a Christian apostle. She said she was not Christian but heathen; she prayed to Jupiter. I told her that was nothing; there was but one God, whose name was neither Jupiter nor Jehovah; and He took each true prayer. Then she said she was no Christian. I asked 'Have you no respect for Christ?' 'None for his *person*, for he had done more harm to the world than any other man.' But that was not his fault; for many

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

years his name has been a *Beil* (axe) with which the bigots have beheaded the liberals; a name in virtue of which the worst tyranny has been carried on. I found, however, that for the man, Jesus of Nazareth, and for all the great doctrines of religion she had the greatest respect. I told her there was, to my thinking, but one religion; that was *being good and doing good*. She said Yes; but doing good was not vulgar charity, but lifting up the fallen,¹ and helping forward the *Entwicklung der Menschheit* (development of man). I stayed an hour and a half and a most animated time we had. Her English is about as bad as my German. Yet she had the exceeding generosity to try to talk English."

Bettina never lost the mental sprightliness of her youth. Herman Grimm² gives a most interesting account of a pilgrimage which he made with her to Weimar when she was nearly sixty, and which she thoroughly enjoyed, though many people in her place would have found the day depressing. It was in October and he met her in the evening at the "Elephant,"³ in the market-place. The next morning they walked from the hotel across the Park to

¹ In 1831, when cholera raged in Berlin, Bettina worked early and late to relieve the stricken poor people of the city.

² In *Fünfzehn Essays*, Vol. III, p. 283 et seq.

³ This hotel — still standing — is also interesting as the one in which Thackeray had "Becky Sharp" stay.

BETTINA

the Garden-House, with which her dearest memories of Goethe were connected. The place was then uninhabited and so badly kept that they were able to enter the garden by a hole in the hedge. For their talk they sat down on the half-broken bench (associated with Goethe and Frau von Stein), and Grimm records that Bettina spoke of Goethe with all her old enthusiasm and quite without a trace of that sadness which pervades almost all the reminiscences of elderly people. "The present which she could still enjoy, held much of pleasure and charm for her." Her house was the resort of people of distinction and up to the very end she kept sympathetically close to the literary aspirations of the rising generation. When she died, January 20, 1859, at the age of seventy-three, she was still as young in spirit as the youngest of her friends.

CHAPTER XIV

MINNA HERZLIEB

ABOUT none of the women with whose name Goethe's is linked has there been more misinformation circulated than about Minna Herzlieb, who has come down to us as the original of Ottilie in *The Elective Affinities*, that very unpleasant story of a husband and wife each of whom acknowledges passion for another. Wilhelmine, or Minna, Herzlieb was the daughter of a former Lutheran pastor in Züllichau, whose father and mother had died and who had, thereupon, been adopted by the Frommanns, well known from their connection with the publishing business. Minna had been born in 1789 and so was a girl of only nine years when she first made the acquaintance of Goethe through his friendly relations with the Frommann household at Jena. A son of that household has pleasantly pictured a typical day spent under his father's roof when he was a child, and one sees from his description how altogether sweet and wholesome was the environment in which Minna was brought up, and against which Goethe necessarily saw her:

MINNA HERZLIEB

"At seven in the morning coffee, after which everyone went to his work. At ten o'clock my father came out of his counting room for his second breakfast, which consisted of bread and butter and fruit, when it was to be had; then he went back to business till one o'clock. My mother gave us lessons. At twelve, usually, a drawing lesson, along with our cousins. . . . At one precisely, dinner; at three my father went to his work again; five o'clock was the tea hour. . . . By this time mother had done her work, all but such as she had put aside, for the evening; the kettle was boiled, bread and butter and biscuits were on the table — anybody might come in who liked. If nobody came, my father would read aloud, for he was fond of reading, and read well. . . . If bachelor friends dropped in to tea, or if ladies had invited themselves, conversation sufficed and it was often very lively. . . . My mother, by the way she listened and asked questions, knew how to make the men talk.¹ When a debate began to get too lively, she knew how to give it a turn. Severe toward herself, she was mild and indulgent toward others: the secret of her power over others lay in her unselfishness. About seven o'clock, husbands would come to fetch their wives; by eight,

¹ She could read and speak English and French, as well as her mother tongue, and she was a miniature-painter of quite uncommon ability.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

all would be over, and the family sitting down to supper. After supper, my father would read aloud to my mother alone."

The house in which this cheerful and very normal life went on stood in the so-called "Graben" of Jena, and was a favourite haunt of Goethe when he was in the university town, as often happened. Then he would come in like other people at the tea hour to talk or to be silent, as best suited his mood. But he appears never to have stayed very late, for once we find him apologizing for having kept the household "out of bed till half past ten o'clock." Louise Seidler recalls, in her memoirs, an occasion when the poet read a part of the *Nibelungen* aloud to the little company here, making explanatory remarks as he went on. Another time he got hold of a magic lantern which some one had sent the Frommann children at Christmas, made the pictures play on the door, and improvised doggerel rhymes to fit them.

Goethe had a dread of curiosity, but he was, none the less, uniformly courteous to those who tried to lionize him — if only they would be natural. One evening at Frau Frommann's tea table, he found a party of students, to whom he told a number of funny stories, but when he looked up to meet their laugh he saw that they were devouring him

MINNA HERZLIEB

with their eyes. So he said, good humouredly, "That's how young folks like me." Sometimes he would complain to his friends, of the bores who came to call on him, and one evening he told Frau Frommann of a handsome young fellow, who had been to see him in the morning and had tried to engage him in conversation about politics. "I could have thrown my arms around his neck," he added, "and said, 'Dear boy, *do* not be so stupid!'" This very visitor, it is interesting to note, complained to Frau Frommann, the next day, of Goethe's coldness and reserve!

Not only did Goethe visit the Frommanns; they also visited him, sometimes staying several nights under the roof of his Weimar home. In the Spring, Frau Frommann always sent him the first asparagus, Jena's being a week earlier than Weimar's, and, in return, he would bring, on his next visit, toys for the children, or some little ornament for Minna.

By November, 1807, when Goethe and his secretary, Riemer, arrived at Jena for quite a long stay, incident to the printing of his *Theory of Colours*, Minna had grown to be a very lovely girl of eighteen, who drew many eyes upon her. She had magnificent black hair, great chestnut-coloured eyes and a frank, hearty expression. Louise Seidler describes her as "the loveliest of all virgin roses, with childlike

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

features and great dark eyes — rather soft and kind than fiery — that looked at everybody in an honest, innocent way and were made on purpose to bewitch you." That she bewitched Goethe, there is no gainsaying. But it is also true that he controlled his inclination for her, and so is by no means to be blamed, as Adolf Stahr has blamed him, for encouraging a passion in a girl forty years his junior. In an endeavour to set George Lewes right, this Berlin essayist has spun out a story ¹ of a deep and lasting passion between Goethe and Minna, a passion which was acknowledged on both sides, and which made both parties very miserable. Düntzer, however, explains away with his usual plausibility every circumstance relating to this matter, and Andrew Hamilton, in the "Contemporary Review" for January, 1876, further clears up the "mystery."

The plain facts of the case appear to be that Goethe, who had known Minna Herzlieb from childhood, came to Jena one day and suddenly discovered that she had grown into a woman — beautiful, magnificent, enchanting. Yet it was not only her beauty that delighted him; it was also her intense womanliness with its graceful reserve and sweet, childlike qualities. Heretofore she had always treated him with the affectionate respect due to an

¹ Adolf Stahr: *Goethe's Frauengestalten*.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.
MINNA HERZLIEB.
 From the miniature painted by Frau Frommann,
 now in the Goethe House, Weimar.



OTTLIE VON GOETHE.
 From a crayon drawing by Heinrich Müller.
 See p. 434.



AUGUST VON GOETHE.
From the painting by Grünler.

MINNA HERZLIEB

elderly and very distinguished guest; she was wont to speak of him indeed as "the dear old gentleman;" but, after he had singled her out, as he now did, for rather special notice, she fell secretly in love with him. (Of this there is irrefutable evidence in certain letters to her friend Christiane Selig, which have come to light since the latter's death.) Her passion is not so greatly to be marvelled at; Goethe was a very famous and very fascinating man, and she only a poor dependent girl at the hero-worshipping age. None the less, it is ridiculous to attribute to them the kind of clandestine relation which Stahr has elaborated. Goethe made no secret of his affection for Minna Herzlieb; letters which he sent the Frommanns in 1807 and later all contained, quite frankly, "affectionate remembrances to Minna," and he wrote to her, as we know, some very charming poems.

In the Spring of 1808, the beautiful young girl went to Züllichau to attend her sister's wedding; but her stay there was lengthened until it came to be more than four years before her return to Jena! Lewes says she was kept from Jena by the Frommanns in order to break up "the dangerous intimacy with Goethe." The truth, however, seems to be that she deliberately cured herself, by a change of scene, of her passion for the poet, as he cured himself of his for her by writing *Elective Affinities*.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

His recovery was much more rapid than hers. Writing to Frau Frommann from Carlsbad, in June, 1808, he observes in a most paternal tone: "We were particularly grateful to you for your assurance of our Minchen's welfare. It was to be foreseen that such a dear child, owing as much as she does to nature and yourself, would be well received and call forth feelings of lively friendship everywhere. But it is odd: when we are vexed at the absence of persons whom we love, we can never fancy either them or their surroundings quite cheerful. So much the more gratifying was your assurance of her well-being. Be pleased to send her our salutations and best wishes."

To further refute the statements of scandal-mongers who have found in Minna's "removal" from Jena an endeavour, on the Frommanns' part to keep her out of Goethe's way, the son of the family, to whose reminiscences we are indebted for much light on this whole matter, tells us that his mother was a good deal disturbed at Minna's prolonged absence. Certainly the family welcomed her back with unmistakable joy!

The Elective Affinities, for which Minna served as a model of Ottilie, is not pleasant reading, especially to English-speaking folk; it was the last of Goethe's famous novels to be translated into English. Yet,

MINNA HERZLIEB

many years after it was written, its author himself said of it that it was the only one of his larger productions in which he was conscious of having aimed at representing an idea. The idea was, of course, the sanctity of the marriage bond. He had proved his own belief in this bond by tardily marrying Christiane and by sticking to her through many ups and downs. During the twenty-eight years which they were together, he became more or less enamoured, as we have seen, with several women of varying degrees of attractiveness, but this is not to say that he was ever disloyal, in any very flagrant sense, to the woman upon whom he had bestowed his name. Though it was the fashion for persons of genius to treat the marriage bond lightly and to talk much of the so-called "Rights of the Passions," Goethe did not follow this fashion. Instead he wrote a book whose particular aim it was to render that fashion *unfashionable*.¹

During the years when Minna Herzlieb was staying at Züllichau and curing herself of her love

¹ Prof. Kuno Francke of Harvard University gives *Elective Affinities* the third place among Goethe's works and says that he knows no other literary production, with the exception of Tolstoi's *Anna Karénina*, which brings before us, with equally inexorable truthfulness, the tragic conflict between elemental instinct and moral law. "But," he continues, "while in *Anna Karénina* we are confronted with utter hopelessness and annihilation in *Elective Affinities* we are led from moral ruin to victory!"

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

for a man no longer free, she refused several offers of marriage, but after a while she did become attached to a young Silesian of good family. The young man's mother, however, refused her consent to a marriage, and Minna, with her usual conscientiousness, at once broke off the engagement. Some time afterwards she again engaged herself, this time to a teacher in a Berlin gymnasium, but she had acted without consulting her heart, and this affair, also came to nothing.

Minna once wrote her friend, Christiane Selig, that she would never marry except for love. Had she kept to this resolution her later life would have proved less tragic than it turned out to be! When Mr. Lewes' *Life of Goethe* became known in Germany, she saw herself therein referred to as a "happy wife," and she said nothing, but some time after her death (July 10, 1865), some of her friends gave out the truth of the matter. It seems that a certain Professor Walch, of Jena, having twice proposed marriage to her and been twice refused, had the temerity, in the Spring of 1821, to try his luck for a third time. This time he was accepted. Minna was thirty-two now, and still very beautiful. He was twenty years her senior and strikingly ugly, awkward and undignified. He was, also, a pedant and narrow-minded. But he stood

MINNA HERZLIEB

well in the community and was fairly affluent. Soon after their betrothal was announced Minna developed a marked aversion to her fiancé and, three weeks before the wedding, both Frau Frommann and Walch urged her to break her engagement rather than fulfil her promise against her inclination. She, however, stuck to her purpose, and in September, 1821, they were married.

Not long afterwards, the unhappy wife left her husband's home and went back to her relations in Züllichau, where, in a few months, a mental disorder showed itself in her for the first time. The illness did not last long however, and, when she was well, Minna's sense of fair play and her longing for Jena combined to bring her back to her duty as a wife. At a distance, it seems, her husband was not so disagreeable to her, for she wrote him friendly letters. But no sooner had she returned to him than her aversion broke out afresh and induced another attack of the mental trouble. Again she left him.

In the years which follow she tried the same experiment repeatedly, though always with the same result. Gentle and loving toward everybody else, she could not bear even to be near her husband! She once wrote to a friend in this connection: "It is dreadful, but when I am at work in my own room, and hear Walch's voice in the passage, even if I

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

know that he is not coming to me, I tremble from head to foot." The tragedy of the ten years during which this ill-assorted couple were together intermittently need not be dwelt upon. A divorce was talked of, but neither would take the first step, and she remained his wife until he died in 1853.

A very interesting account has come down to us, and is quoted by Andrew Hamilton, in the "Contemporary Review" article already referred to, of a visit paid to Minna in Züllichau, where she was then (1857) living, by a Berlin admirer of Goethe anxious to learn the truth about this affair. "Minna received me," he¹ says, "with extreme kindness, and at once engaged in conversation about the time spent by her in Jena. She was then bordering on seventy, but her tall slim figure, her blooming complexion and the ease of her movements made her look at least twenty years younger. The first subject of our conversation was Lewes' book² on Goethe which had just come out, but which she had not yet read. She was glad that Goethe was coming into fashion again; so she expressed herself. Still, she eluded adroitly and with a sort of embarrassed smile my question whether she had recognized herself in Ottilie. But she positively denied that she had been removed

¹ Herr von Löpper.

² The second volume in which *The Elective Affinities* is spoken of did not appear in the German translation till late in the Autumn of 1857.

MINNA HERZLIEB

from Jena on Goethe's account or, as Lewes says, sent back to school. She did not, however, deny that many of Goethe's sonnets were dedicated to her, remarking, 'You must always remember that Goethe was a poet,' and adding that several of the poems she had never seen until she met them in print.

"When I laid stress on Goethe's having been in his fifty-eighth year while she was in her eighteenth, she replied with animation: 'Goethe was always young; you did not observe his age.' She said he had always been most amiable toward her, and when she looked back on him and on that period, she had no recollections but pleasant ones. Unaffected veneration, almost enthusiasm, expressed themselves in her voice and looks. She denied that Goethe had ever sent her the sonnets and declared that she possessed neither letters nor poems of his, with the exception of some lines which he had written in a copy of his printed poems. At my request, she rose, and stepping briskly, fetched from the next room the volume of poems referred to. I copied on a piece of paper which she gave me the dedication strophe of May 22d, 1817 — which, at the time of my visit, was not known to have been addressed to Minna.

"As I turned over the leaves of the book, our conversation fell on many of the poems contained in it, and I saw that she was quite at home in them,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

knew a number of them by heart and, when I quoted a line, could supply the rest. Her honest, brown eyes were nearly always covered by their long lashes, and though she entered on the conversation gracefully and delicately, she was, on the whole, reserved and bashful — almost like a young girl. Her sister-in-law, who was in the room the whole time, put an end to the conversation, as the recollections seemed to excite Minna. . . . At that time I knew nothing about her mental malady, consideration for which, doubtless, guided the conduct of the sister-in-law. Afterwards, at the time of the preparations for the Goethe exhibition in Berlin, I wrote to Minna and asked her to lend me the volume. She refused in the following characteristic words:

“ ‘SIR: Being prevented by my absence from Züllichau from sooner answering your letter, I could not till to-day beg your indulgence for my inability — yielding, as I do, to the propensities known to you — to fulfil your wish. Great as is the worth that the book has for me, its contribution to your magnificent undertaking would be but small. For this reason, it will be easy for you to pardon my seeming disobligingness. With many regards,

“ ‘MINNA WALCH HERZLIEB.

“ ‘ZÜLLICHAU, April 27, 1861.’ ”

MINNA HERZLIEB

Nor was Herr von Löpper able to obtain her picture for the exhibition. Three years later, her old disorder returned with such violence that it was found necessary to take her to an insane hospital at Görlitz, and there, in less than a year, she died. By her will she left to a member of the Frommann family a sealed parcel which contained, besides a number of family letters and several other things of interest to both women, three mementoes of Goethe: first, a drawing of his; second, a dried flower folded in paper, on which, in Minna's hand, was written, "With great deliberation and, no doubt, with many fine thoughts in his inmost soul, plucked by the dear old gentleman in our blue room, in a familiar circle of persons, on June 20, 1807;" third, the sonnet "Wachsthum" in Goethe's handwriting, but without the first four lines, which had been clipped off; underneath it was the date "December 13, 1807, Midnight."

It is unfortunate that the date with the dried flower is a wrong one, inasmuch as this shows that Minna's sentimental memories of the great poet were not wholly accurate ones; in June, 1807, he was not in Jena, but in Carlsbad. Moreover, the fact that she had the sonnet in her possession does not harmonize well with her declaration to Von Löpper that she possessed no writing of Goethe's but the lines in

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

the book. Yet Goethe himself, it will be remembered, could not, in his old age, relate with entire accuracy the details of his various *affaires du cœur*. And this passion of Minna's for the poet had, not unnaturally, been a good deal blurred in its outlines by the very trying emotional experiences of her later life. That she herself came early to understand that hers was a passionate nature her letters to her girl-friend, Christiane Selig,¹ make quite clear. In speaking of the student, young Manteuffel, whom she had loved and been loved by, during his academic years in Jena, she said, "my emotions are so strong and my reason so weak that I am often afraid the former may quite overbear the latter." Perhaps it is to the fact that she *did* understand herself and knew when she must flee from temptation that we owe her scatheless passage through the perilous period of Goethe's love for her. To her it appeared to be a sin just to love him as she did, and her allusions to her secret suffering at this time are very pitiful.

Goethe also suffered. "There is nothing in *Elective Affinities* through which I have not myself lived," he said once to Eckermann, "and there is much more in it than anyone may get in a single reading. But," he added, "even though the story contains no incident that did not actually happen,

¹ *Goethe's Minchen*: Karl Theodor Gaedertz. Bremen, 1887.

MINNA HERZLIEB

nothing happened exactly as is there related." Yet, sad as was Ottilie's fate, Minna Herzlieb's may scarcely be called more bright. Truly enough could she have said, with the sweet young heroine of that novel, "Fate has not dealt kindly with me and whoever loves me cannot expect anything else than a tragic lot like my own."

CHAPTER XV

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

AMONG the women to be remembered and honoured as beloved friends of Goethe's later life none stands out so clearly as Marianne von Willemer, the Suleika of the *Westöstlicher Divan* and herself a poet of very marked gifts. When Goethe first made the acquaintance of Marianne she was the ward and not the wife of Johann Jacob Willemer;¹ but by the time the poet's friendly attachment came to be celebrated in his charming lyrics of the East the wedding, which was the only logical outcome of the relation between Willemer and his ward, had taken place. Thus the husband of Marianne was a witness, and a not unwilling one, to the passionate kisses and ardent embraces which the two poets exchanged — on paper.

Willemer was a remarkable man, one whom Goethe might well be proud to call his friend. Eleven years the poet's junior, he had also been born in Frankfort, where his father was a prosperous banker. Unlike

¹ He was not given his patent of nobility until some years later.

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

Goethe, however, he had passed nearly all his life in this city on the Main, where each year brought him more and more honour at the hands of his fellow-citizens. One distinction, which came to him in 1800 as a result of his warm interest in the theatre, was a place on the Board of Direction of the Frankfort playhouse. Through this connection it was that he came, as we shall see, to win immortality.

Among the players then attached to the National Theatre of Frankfort was the widow of an Austrian instrument-maker, who with her fourteen-year-old daughter was making a brave struggle for self-support in the difficult calling of an actress. The girl bore the not ingratiating name of Marie Anna Katharina Therese Jung, and though she was a graceful dancer, a sweet singer and had an open and attractive face, there was little chance of a brilliant stage future for her. Willemer, who had daughters of his own, became more and more reluctant, as he watched the little Austrian, to leave her in the midst of the temptations then inherent in theatrical life. Readers of Goethe's description (in *Wilhelm Meister*) of the atmosphere and loose manners common behind the scenes will appreciate the good man's scruples. So it came about that, in consideration of two thousand gulden, — a sum sufficient to make the mother comfortable for life, — Marianne, as she

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

was familiarly called, came at the age of sixteen into Willemer's household, there to grow to womanhood with his own girls and to receive with them special training in music and in art.

Of course Frankfort had a great deal to say about the arrangement. Marianne was severely censured for "forsaking" her mother and the tongues of the gossips wagged joyously over the adoption, by a man who, though twice widowed, was still only forty, of a lovely young girl less than half his age. Willemer, however, appears not to have been disturbed by any of this; and Marianne's mother came to visit her child at intervals quite as if she had never been "forsaken." So the years passed, Willemer usefully employed with his bank and with the writing of plays, the girls in his home growing all the time into more and more blooming womanhood, and the one son of the house, Brammy, gradually shooting up from lanky boyhood into callow youth. Besides their town house the Willemers had a charming country-seat on the upper Main, near Offenbach, and at this place, called the *Gerbermühle*, they entertained generously. Once, before Marianne came to them, Goethe with August and Christiane Vulpius came there to visit, and when the poet's mother died, in September, 1808, and Christiane went to Frankfort alone, Willemer's



MARIANNE VON WILLEMER.
From the painting now in the Museum
of the Goethe House, Frankfurt.



CHRISTIANE NEUMANN.
After the portrait by Kraus.
See p. 330.



CHRISTIANE VULPIUS.
From a drawing made by
Friedrich Bury in 1800.



GOETHE.

From the painting by Heinrich Kolbe now in the Wallraf-Richartz
Museum, Cologne.

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

doors were again opened to her. Goethe's letter of thanks for this kindness to his wife ¹ is the first of the remarkable series of letters between the two households which have been preserved; the last is dated February 23, 1832, less than a month before the poet passed away.

Yet in this correspondence, which covers a quarter of a century, and which is, for the most, between a man and a woman who loved each other tenderly, there is really only one love-letter; for this Goethe manfully apologized to Willemer.

Because of politics and by reason of the fact that his excursions were almost always to baths in a different direction, Goethe had not, for many years, gone back to the town of his birth. With the summer of 1814, however, came the desired opportunity to revisit the Rhine-land and it was with anticipations almost as keen as those which had accompanied his first journey to Italy that he drove out from Weimar on July 25 under bright skies in which a rainbow shone clearly. "To be sure it is a white rainbow," he observed, "but it is none the less truly a rainbow." Prompted by which the poet in him sang:

"So sollst du, munt'rer Greis,
Dich nicht betrüben,
Sind gleich die Haare weiss,
Doch wirst du lieben."

¹ They had then been married two years.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Not that his hair was really white! Though his sixty-fourth birthday loomed very near only a silver thread here and there flecked the abundant brown locks with which his head was still thickly crowned. Like that of a young man, too, was his joy in the familiar scenes which now met his eye on every side. As he passed through Erfurt many old acquaintances waved him friendly greetings from the shops he had been wont to patronize. "I still seemed, after many years, to be well liked," he records naively. And so he joined heartily in whatever of interest he encountered until, on the fourth day of his journey, he found himself again in his native city. To his wife he wrote with deep emotion of his pride and joy in thus coming "home." But Wiesbaden, where he was to take the cure, was the point which he had it in mind to reach before stopping long in Frankfort, and it was from this resort, where he stayed five weeks, that he made the numerous Rhine excursions towards which he had so long been looking forward.

Thus it was not until September that he found himself in Frankfort for the visit which furnished *Die Oberpostamtszeitung* with the following paragraph: "His Excellency, the Ducal Saxe-Weimarian Privy Councillor Herr von Goethe, the greatest and oldest living hero of our literature,

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

arrived yesterday *en route* from Wiesbaden, in his native city which had been deprived of his enjoyable presence for twenty years." He was the guest for some days in Frankfort of Fritz Schlosser,¹ the nephew of his brother-in-law, George Schlosser, and then he was borne down to Heidelberg to view the art collection of the brothers Boisserée, one of whom, Sulpiz, was his enthusiastic admirer and devoted friend. When he again returned to Frankfort it was to be the guest at the *Gerbermühle* of the Willemers.

Willemer had then only just been married to the lovely girl who had grown to womanhood under his roof. When Goethe first met her, during his September stay, she had been a maiden and, therefore, free to receive the admiration which he lavished with diplomatic impartiality upon her and upon Willemer's widowed daughter, Rosette Städel. The latter, indeed, made no secret of her feelings towards the poet. "He is a man," she wrote in her diary immediately after their first meeting, "whom one cannot help loving like a child and to whom one would gladly entrust oneself entirely." Whether Marianne let herself go as far as this thus early in her acquaintance with Goethe we have

¹ Fritz's wife it was who was wont to terminate any criticism of Goethe which was ever voiced in her presence with the abrupt, "You did not know him."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

no knowledge. Writing to Christiane the news of the marriage, Goethe added that Marianne was "as friendly and kind as before." Which, being interpreted, means that he and she continued on very affectionate terms.

It is amusing to note how ingeniously Goethe details to Christiane his developing intimacy with this bride of a fortnight. On October 16 he writes, "We were very merry and remained a long time together, so that I have no further events to record of this day," and on the eighteenth, we learn that they were all together during a delightful evening, watching the bonfires kindled everywhere in commemoration of the first anniversary of the battle of Leipzig. Theodore Creizenach,¹ who has edited the correspondence between Marianne and Goethe, says that, on this occasion, Goethe wrote his name and the date on the window-frame of the tower from which they viewed the fires and he implies that the poet also inscribed a tender verse in this place. "The inscription," he adds, "was not many years afterwards effaced through carelessness, to Marianne's deep distress."

Far more effectively, however, than in any casual verse made to celebrate a sentimental occasion has the deep and beautiful affection between these two

¹*Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Marianne von Willemer*, Stuttgart, 1877.

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

been preserved in the poems which now added themselves to the *Westöstlicher Divan*. This work had been begun before Goethe went to Frankfort. But after he had met Marianne she became the Suleika of the poems. It was, indeed, in the thought of the happiness to be theirs when they should be together again that the new verses wrote themselves in the early months of 1815.

Yet the poet had left Marianne without a single heartache, the previous October, contentedly rejoining Christiane, in fulfilment of a letter which ended, "Will be in Weimar Tuesday or Wednesday, please God, deeply rejoiced to see you again! I have had enough of the outside world; we will now again experience the joys of home." It was, indeed, at the very time when Goethe, the *poet*, had been composing most ardent verses to Marianne von Willemer that Goethe, the *man*, wrote to Marianne's husband a letter in which occurs this paragraph: "I have suffered much [this winter]. My good wife was very close to death, but she is now, happily, on her feet again."¹ Biographical bits like this must be hard for salacious writers to reconcile with the romance they are pleased to build up around Goethe's admiration for Marianne von Willemer.

¹ Goethe an Willemer, April 3, 1815.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The truth of the matter seems to be that, while on both sides the interchange of poetry had begun in affectionate friendship, it was soon recognized, by Goethe as well as Marianne, that they were playing with fire. At first Marianne was called "little dear" in the verses and she accepted the name, replying:

"Zu den Kleinen zähl ich mich,
'Liebe Kleine' nennst du mich.
Willst du immer mich so heissen,
Werd' ich stets mich glücklich preisen."

But Goethe soon saw that this appellation was not sufficiently Eastern for poems written in emulation of Hafiz and he announced that Marianne was to be Suleika, he himself to appear in the poems as Hatem. Even thus early, however, he knew only too well that love thrives on verse-making and that though

"Leicht ist die Lieb' im Anfang,
Es folgen aber Schwierigkeiten."

Yet strong as was his premonition that he would be wise to keep away, circumstances in the summer of 1815 sent him back to Marianne's neighbourhood. He had had a bad cough for many weeks and the doctors agreed that one of the Rhine resorts was much more nearly the cure he needed than the Bohemian baths to which, for many years, he had been wont to go. So from the end of May to the

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

middle of July he devoted himself diligently at Wiesbaden to the recovery of his health. Then with Minister von Stein he journeyed down the Rhine as far as Cologne and visited with keen enjoyment the great Cathedral and the art collections of that city. Upon his return to Wiesbaden on August 7, he dispatched to the Willemers a letter telling them that they may expect to find him knocking at the door of the *Gerbermühle* "next Sunday the twelfth;" and on the day announced there he was. He had intended a visit of about a week but the week had stretched into five before he and Marianne decided that they must part. She had grown so dear to the poet by reason of her brightness, her grace, her singing and her sympathy that the situation quickly became more dangerous than either was aware.

But what wonderfully happy weeks they had had! The wind-swept balcony looking towards the river, the garden with its deep shade, the thick forest near by, the mountain views and the gracious, informal hospitality dispensed by this beloved woman could not but make Goethe very happy. Forty years before, he had watched the clouds and and moon from a place very near though a little further down the stream while the victim of a love which brought him only pain. Gardens and terraces with Lili by his side had given slight satisfac-

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

tion compared with what he now felt as Marianne, of an evening, read his Suleika poems aloud or, to the soft accompaniment of a piano, sang his "Mignon" or his ballad about The God and The Bayadere. Goethe, months afterward, told Zelter with great enthusiasm that the impression Marianne's first singing of this ballad had made upon him was so profound he wished she might never sing it again! Had he needed another reminder of the great difference between Marianne's experience of life and his own he would have had one in his sixty-sixth birthday, which the Willemers now helped him to celebrate. The woman he loved was only thirty-one and, in many ways, very girlish for her years. Moreover, her music, her grace, her poetic gifts and her social charm united to make her, of all the women he had ever known, the one to whom his nature most entirely responded. Marianne would always remain his friend but he must take great care not to make her really unhappy.

One morning, therefore, he announced that he was about to put in a week exploring the libraries and the art collections of Frankfort, and Sulpiz Boisserée was set to seeking a proper lodging for him. But Willemer begging urgently that they make use of his town-house for headquarters, the matter was so arranged — and Goethe tore himself away

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

from the *Gerbermühle*. Thereupon followed a daily interchange of songs, all of which breathed deep and powerful love, though some, as Goethe's "Opportunity" and Marianne's reply to the same, cleverly conceal under a surface lightness of tone the pulse of importunate passion. Not to be misunderstood by anybody, however, was the leaf of the Eastern plant *Gingo Biloba* which he sent her out from Frankfort as a symbol of his friendship. This plant is so formed that one always asks whether it has one leaf, which has separated into two parts, or two leaves which are trying to grow together.

Goethe had promised to visit Boisserée at Heidelberg but, before going, he felt that he must have at least a few days more by Marianne's side. Therefore, on Friday the fifteenth, he and his companion went to the *Gerbermühle* to stay over Sunday. To the mistress of the house he presented a shawl just bought for her at the Frankfort fair and she gave him, in her turn, an order embroidered with Sun and Moon, declaring that a Turkish merchant had given it to her for the great poet. In a letter which Marianne sent Goethe, nine years later (April 27, 1834), there is a reference to this little joke which had given him pleasure. "What a happy time it was!" she then adds wistfully, "certainly, my happiest!"

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Though the sadness of approaching farewells came now and then to the surface as they talked during this last visit it was, for the most part, an ideally pleasurable week-end. During the first evening Boisserée related, as they all sat together on the balcony, how while he was a student at Strassburg his host had been wont to beguile dull dinners by telling him tales of the young Goethe. Saturday evening, Marianne sang for them, accompanying herself on the guitar, after which Goethe read aloud his ghostly ballad, "The Dance of Death." Sunday evening, the last that Goethe was ever to spend at the *Gerbermühle* (though he then had no thought that such would be the case), was made memorable by Marianne's exquisite rendering of a number of *Volkslieder* and by the bewitching charm with which she gave the aria from Don Giovanni: "*Gib mir die Hand mein Leben.*" Goethe said she was herself a little Don Juan at which all present laughed heartily, and she hid her blushing face in the music. Then Goethe read some of his Persian love poems aloud, Marianne listening very quietly with the gorgeous yellow turban which the poet had given her bound about her head. Willemer fell asleep at this stage and was sadly teased, upon awaking, by the others, who found one o'clock on a moonlight night quite soon enough for slumber. When they

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

did go to their rooms an amusing incident took place which gave occasion to many a merry jest afterward. Boisserée had accompanied Goethe to his chamber and it occurred to the poet that this was a good chance to show him the experiment of the coloured shadow. They, therefore, stepped out on the balcony with a wax taper. There Marianne caught sight of them and drew a comical sketch of Goethe holding a candle out of the window in order to see the moon more clearly!

There was nothing of comedy, however, about the talk which the poet and his dear new friend had together the next morning. Bielschowsky says that she "begged him earnestly to leave, the ardency having grown too intense for her." Düntzer, however, would have us think that their earnest words at parting were all about the poems they planned to make together. For there was every intention that Suleika and Hatem should enjoy each other's love even if Marianne and Goethe must part for ever. To this end they arranged a cipher reference to Hammer's translation of Hafiz's collection of songs by means of which they might, though at a distance, communicate to each other their poetic emotions. On the twenty-first Goethe received his first letter in the code and he answered it the same day with two new songs expressive

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

of the deepest emotion. Every day brought new songs, now, some of Marianne's being scarcely distinguishable from those of the great poet.

It had been arranged that Willemer should bring his wife and his daughter to Heidelberg while Goethe was there and from yearning thoughts of this meeting sprang the most beautiful verses ever penned by a German woman, the noble "Song of the East Wind," the fourth stanza of which Goethe changed without improving when he printed the poem among his own songs in the *Divan*.

But though Boisserée had been eagerly expecting his friends they arrived a whole day sooner than he had thought they would and Goethe's rapture at seeing Marianne, thus unexpectedly, was thereupon voiced in the verses beginning .

"Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,
Drück' ich wieder dich ans Herz!"

a poem known in translation as "The Reunion."

The moon was full that evening of the Heidelberg reunion and Goethe and Marianne promised themselves to think of each other at every full moon thereafter. Both felt that they might never be together again and when they went to the Castle for a last visit the poet pulled for his beloved another

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

leaf of the *Gingo Biloba*, and pressed a fervent kiss upon her forehead.¹

The Willemer party left for home early the next morning, and about the same time that Marianne was composing her "Song of the West Wind," with its burden of desire that her lover shall know how her heart aches for him, Goethe was easing his troubled soul by the famous dialogue in verse of which the first stanzas, spoken by Suleika, are held by many to be the confession of his own deepest faith:

"Volk und Knecht und Überwinder,
Sie gestehn zu jeder Zeit:
Höchstes Glück der Erdenkinder
Sei nur die Persönlichkeit."

Goethe's real belief, however, as we see when we read this poem in its entirety, is that, though we can be truly happy only as we, in Emerson's parlance, "insist upon ourselves," it is not by clinging stubbornly to our own personality but by giving ourselves lavishly to others and for others that we come to self-realization. Is not this, indeed, the whole lesson of the completed *Faust*?

Goethe was now no longer at an age when he could indulge, without paying dear, in such a

¹ Forty-five years later, in 1860, the year of her death, all the details of this parting were related to a sympathetic friend by Marianne, while on a memorial visit to the Castle.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

passion as found expression in the wonderful *Divan* poetry. Though he might temporarily feel the weight of years lifted from his shoulders as he read the glorious verses in which Marianne poured out her love for him a reaction was of course inevitable. He continued to write with all his wonted fire but he confessed to Boisserée that he was not feeling well; soon he announced that he must set out for home, adding that he would go by way of Würzburg instead of through Frankfort. Sulpiz, like the good friend that he was, accompanied him on his way, and he records that Goethe's spirits rose steadily as the distance from Frankfort increased. Naïvely he assigns as an explanation of this Goethe's lessening fear that he would be overtaken by the Duke and Caroline Jagemann, whom he was always anxious to avoid. But the real reason that the poet rejoiced as he drew away from Frankfort, the reason why he did not go near Frankfort on this occasion or ever again, seems to me to be contained in the following letter which he sent Willemer from Heidelberg:

“DEAR, ESTEEMED FRIEND: That I am constantly mindful of you and of your happy surroundings, that I see more vividly than if I were there the groves which you yourself planted and your airy yet substantial house, that I go over in memory again and

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

again all the pleasure, consideration, kindness and love which I have enjoyed by your side, you yourself doubtless feel; for, certainly, I cannot be banished from those shady spots and I must often meet you there. I have had a hundred fancies as to when, how and where I should see you again, as until yesterday I had the duty assigned me of spending some charming days with my prince on the Rhine and the Main, perhaps even joining in that brilliant anniversary celebration on the Mühlberg. Now these plans are upset and I am hastening home via Würzburg. My only consolation is the fact that without caprice and without resistance I am walking in the prescribed way and hence may all the more innocently direct my longings toward those whom I leave behind. . . .”¹

In other words Goethe had, once more, seen what he must do and, with admirable resolution, had set himself promptly to do it. Willemer was his friend, Marianne was his — Suleika, and he was an honourable man though a poet. It was his firm belief that Willemer and Marianne were “*beneidenswerth glücklich verbunden*” (a most enviably happy pair). That he might by any chance spoil such a marriage was a thought full of horror!

¹ *Goethe und Marianne von Willemer*, p. 68.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

The poems continued, however, as did the letters. But the latter were almost all addressed to Willemer or to the married pair jointly and, with only one exception, as has been said, they were letters of merely affectionate friendship, marked now and then by a touch of involuntary wistfulness. That of the December eighteenth following the Heidelberg parting says, in reply to Willemer's news that Marianne has not been well, "It is painful for me to think of the dear little one as not being at the piano. How happy you are, though, to be able to spend your love and your wealth upon her!"

In the spring Christiane died and Goethe's sympathetic Frankfort friends were more than ever anxious that he should come to them for the quiet and comfort he needed. But he resisted the temptation during that as during many a subsequent summer. August Goethe went occasionally to the Willemers' home, the worthy husband of Marianne sometimes came to visit Goethe in Frankfort and after August had married, his wife Ottilie was an ever-welcome guest at the *Gerbermühle*. But Goethe and Marianne never met again. Each summer she would urge him, in innocent woman-fashion, to come to Frankfort and always it seemed as if he must yield to the temptation and go. But when the time for his holiday arrived he would deliber-

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER •

ately set his face in another direction. In the fall an affectionate letter would tell the Willemers how great was his regret not to have been with them.

Though Goethe's letters up to the year 1819 were almost invariably addressed either to Willemer or to "Willemer und Frau," the replies were from Marianne's hand. They spoke, however, for her husband as well as for herself. Then, in July, 1819, she suddenly threw self-restraint to the winds and in the name of their former love called passionately upon the poet to assure her that he still cared, that he had not forgotten. She had been reading, not long before, the proof sheets of the *Buch Suleika* which he had sent her and had been profoundly moved by these "remembrances of a happy past." Womanlike she wished to be assured that the love which had meant so much to her still lived in the poet's heart. Moreover, her husband had recently seen and talked with Goethe at Weimar and his account of this visit appears to have awakened in her uncontrollable longing to draw Goethe close to her. She tells him that she is now by herself at Baden and instructs him how to reach her with the "few lines" she so ardently desires. Goethe at once replied in the letter where, for the first and only time, the passionate "Du" occurs between them, a letter which, though written only a month

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

before his seventieth birthday, has in it as much of fire as any that he ever sent to Frau von Stein. So long as Marianne seemed desirous of maintaining silence, he says, he felt bound to conceal his feelings for her but now that she has said to him, so beautifully, that she thinks of him and is glad to have him think of her he hastens to send the double and treble assurance that his heart beats constantly in answer to her heart. The letter closes with the words, "Oh that we might be together!"¹

But there were no more passionate outbreaks on either side. The letters now resumed their usual tone of affectionate friendliness, varied by references to gifts exchanged at Christmas and on birthdays. In 1822, when Goethe was in the throes of his absorbing passion for Ulrike von Levetzow, Marianne's cheerful missives were for a time unanswered, but as soon as the poet regained his poise he gladly took up the friendship again and not until his death did the correspondence flag on either side.

In the summer of 1824 he had sent Eckermann to call at the *Gerbermühle* and thus it was from a friendly hand that Marianne received the sad news when Goethe breathed his last. Some time before the aged poet, feeling that his months might be numbered, had begun to make up into packets the

¹ See *Goethe und Marianne von Willemer*, p. 118.

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

letters in his possession, intending to return them to the senders. One of these packets contained Marianne's letters and he wrote for it, on March 3, 1831, eight lines beginning

"Vor die Augen meiner Lieben,
Zu den Fingern die's geschrieben."

But since he could not bear to give this dear one too soon the pain which he knew any reminder of his approaching death must evoke, the letters did not until later find their way to Frankfort. Then Eckermann sent them with a note containing these lines: "Scarcely anyone had so intimate and beautiful a relation to him as you had. One who *could* stand in such a relation to him must have been something; and one who received so generously from him must have become much."

Theirs was, indeed, a very wonderful friendship. Marianne was peculiarly able to give to Goethe much that he needed to cheer and stimulate him, for she combined in quite a rare way earnestness of soul and gaiety of heart. She was like Goethe in that she deeply loved Italy and all things Italian, like him, too, in that she was capable of many warm and generous friendships. Her letters to the children of her husband's daughters are delightful reading, for she herself kept always the heart of a child and so knew how best to come close to young people.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

While she was still very young she was known in the family circle as "dear grandmother."

The relation between her and her husband was a really exquisite one of congenial comradeship,¹ tender affection, perfect sympathy and deep mutual trust. On her thirtieth birthday Willemer expressed his appreciation of all that Marianne meant to him in a little verse which might be rendered:

"You, dear, are my solace, the crown of all my life,
Clever, do men call me, that I won thy heart?
But I *won* it not, dear, God hath given it to me.
From no human bounty comes a loving wife."

Willemer was not an ordinary German husband, however, who, while grateful for the love of his wife, believes that wifhood and motherhood should be the measure of woman's activity. He wished Marianne to develop her own gifts. They were about a century ahead of their time in their conception of what a true marriage should mean and they must often have laughed together over the clever rendering which Marianne gave of the ideal married state as exemplified all around them. The satire is worthy of Bernard Shaw though much of the fable's literary

¹ Willemer loved animals and their home always sheltered two or three favourite dogs which Marianne was wont on festival occasion to make march in procession, each bearing in his mouth a message of congratulation. It must have been a trial to the Willemers to suppress their dogs when Goethe was their guest. He was not fond of trick puppies.

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER

charm is necessarily lost in any translation. I have called it the tale of

MR. AND MRS. SPARROW

A sparrow sits on yonder roof,
Beside him sits his wife.
And he unto his treasure saith,
"Kiss me, my dearest life!

"Soon now for us will cherries bloom,
I scent the sweet spring air.
Ah! how I love spring's tender green
And peas with juices rare!"

"But my good man," his wife implored,
"Please think upon your duty.
To build our nest should be your care
Rather than muse on beauty."

Her lord replied, "A nest to build,
Our young to bear and nourish,
That is your sphere, my dearest dear,"
— So spake he with a flourish.

"Oh, selfish wretch," his wife exclaimed,
"Must I then delve and mother
While you sit happily apart,
Free as your bachelor brother?"

"Aye, that you must," her help-meet said,
"You've tasks too great to measure;
But man's is quite a different case,
His only duty's pleasure."

A married pair who could see the pith and point
of this fable would inevitably have attracted Goethe.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

HE was seventy-four at the time and she was only seventeen. Yet she would have married him had it not been for the attitude of his family towards his passion; and he was honestly, naïvely anxious to marry her.

To get at the truth of this whole episode is not at all easy inasmuch as Goethe deliberately distorted it when talking of it to Eckermann; and Ulrike, who died only a dozen years ago (!), made it the business of her life to guard the precious secret. It is said that she kept several dogs¹ for the express purpose of chasing away reporters who besieged her castle out of eagerness to find out and print the details of this most piquant *affaire*.

Ulrike von Levetzow, born in 1804, succumbed on November 13, 1899, to the fate which awaits us all, and it was then found that she had bequeathed to the Grand Duchess Sophia of Saxony Goethe's let-

¹ In one corner of her park these favourites were honoured after death each with a gravestone bearing a name.



ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW.



SCHILLER.
From the portrait by Jäger.

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

ters to her and to her mother which have since been printed in the Goethe Jahr-Buch for 1900. Much more interesting, however, than these is her own account¹ which has since come to light, of her relation to the poet.

"It has often made me sad to reflect," she begins, "that a true memory of the time when I knew Goethe will die with me and that all the erroneous accounts and fairy-tales that have been written about it cannot then be gainsaid. I will, therefore, try to write down here all that I can recall which has any bearing on the matter.

"My grandparents knew Goethe, Schiller and the Grand Duke quite well . . . and my mother, as a young woman, came to know the poet in Carlsbad. She often related that she was once greatly embarrassed at having inadvertently answered, when asked by the poet whose poems she liked better, his or Schiller's: 'I don't always very well understand either; but Schiller's I *feel*.' Goethe did not take offence at this, but remained very friendly towards her and often engaged her in conversation. Several years afterwards when Mother was in Teplitz at a large party given by the Prince, to which Goethe had also been invited, he came directly up to the circle in which she stood, and, ere she had noticed

¹ *Deutsche Arbeit*: January, 1904.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

his arrival, exclaimed, 'That voice can belong only to my little Levetzow.' After which he conversed exclusively with her. She had many reproaches to bear from her friends because she had not earlier told them that she knew Goethe well. In a letter¹ which I later received from Goethe he refers to my mother as a brilliant star of his earlier years.

"I came to know Goethe in 1821 in Marienbad whither Mother had brought me from my *pension* in Strassburg in order that we might together pass some months with my grandparents there. Marienbad was then a small, almost unknown resort and our house, 'Stadt Weimar,' one of the largest and most beautiful in the place. Goethe had taken up his residence there, and I can remember, with perfect distinctness, how we first became acquainted. Grandmother sent for me to come to her, and the servant who brought the message told me that there was an old gentleman with her who wished to see me. The summons didn't please me very well as it interrupted some needle-work I had just begun. But, of course, I went promptly.

"As I came into the room, where my Mother, also, sat, the latter said, 'This is my elder daughter, Ulrike.' Goethe shook hands with me in friendly

¹ See *Goethe an Ulrike*, January 9, 1823; *Goethe Jahr-Buch XXI*, p. 7.

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

fashion and asked me how I liked Marienbad. Since I had passed the last few years in a French *pension* at Strassburg, was only seventeen years old and knew nothing of Goethe, — what a famous man and great poet he was, — I was quite without embarrassment in replying to the friendly old gentleman, quite without the shyness which often seized me in the presence of new acquaintances. Soon Goethe said that I must take a walk with him some morning and tell him all about Strassburg and the educational establishment at which I had been studying. I, however, declined on the ground that I was greatly missing my sister — from whom I was then for the first time separated — and I am convinced that this childlike ingenuousness interested him, for he from that time on concerned himself much with me. Almost every morning he took me with him when he went walking, and when I didn't go with him he brought me flowers, for he very soon noticed that I had no interest in the stones, which he was wont to examine carefully, though I was glad to let myself be instructed about them. Toward evening he often sat for hours on a bench before the door and told me about many different objects.

“ By the time I learned what a great man he was I knew him too well and was on too good terms with him to be shy or embarrassed. Nor did it occur to

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

anyone, least of all to my mother, to see anything out of the way in the pleasure taken by this man, old enough to be my grandfather, in the companionship of a child, — as I then was. Goethe was such a friendly, amiable old gentleman that a young creature might very well feel drawn to him, especially if she took a lively interest in flowers, trees, stars and literature, all of which he could make so enchanting.

“It was that same summer that Goethe presented me with *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre*, a new edition of which had been sent to him at Marienbad. When he gave it to me and I began to read it, I found that something must have preceded it, since I came often on allusions to what I had not seen. I told this to Goethe and asked him to give me the earlier volume also. Whereupon he said that that wasn't a book for me, that he would rather tell me what I needed to know in order to understand the *Wanderjahre*. How often have I since regretted that I did not write down this narrative as he recited it. That would have been of much greater interest than many of the letters and notes about which people now make so much fuss.

“As our circle of acquaintances in Marienbad increased I came to know many young girls, and it often happened that, when bad weather prevented

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

us from going out, Goethe supplied little plays for us. . . .

" In the summer of 1822 I was again in Marienbad, and this time my sisters were there also, since they, too, had now left the school in Strassburg. . . . Goethe was again with us, and my youngest sister, Bertha, who was then only fourteen, took a great fancy to mineralogy. . . . I remember that once Goethe called us to him and there, on a long table, arranged in order, were all the species of stones to be found in the neighbourhood of Marienbad. He led me to a place where, between the stones, he had placed a pound of Vienna chocolate upon which was written

" Geniess das auf deine eigene Weise,
Wo nicht als Trank, doch als geliebte Speise. G." ¹

Goethe had put the chocolate among the stones for me as a joke because he knew the minerals would not interest me.

" That summer Goethe was very friendly with me and distinguished me by every kind of attention. Often he told my grandmother that he very much wished he had another son who might be my husband. Then he, Goethe, could mould me after his

¹ " However taken this is good,
If not as drink, why then, as food."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

own fancy, for he had a great and fatherly love for me. . . . Many people came to Marienbad that year, and as nearly all of them desired to become acquainted with Goethe, I was often approached to manage the matter; he never refused to meet those I brought to him, often as his good nature was imposed upon.

“ And now my memory fails me, for I cannot rightly remember whether it was in this year or in the following that the Grand Duke of Weimar, who had previously so befriended Goethe, came to Marienbad. I do know, however, that he stayed at our house, which had not, before that time, received the name ‘ Stadt Weimar.’ I have already said that the Grand Duke was very friendly with my grandparents and my mother and had often seen us as children. He was very gracious to all of us this time, also, and it was he who first suggested to me and to my family that I should marry Goethe. At first we took it for a joke and thought that Goethe, certainly, would not think of such a thing. But the Grand Duke talked of it again and again, presented it to me, indeed, in the most attractive light; told me how I should become the first lady of the Court and in Weimar; how greatly he, the prince, would distinguish me, even to giving my parents, at once, a house in Weimar — in order that I might not be

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

separated from them — and caring for my future in every possible way. To my mother he talked much of the matter and, later, I heard that he had promised her that, since in all probability I should outlive Goethe he would settle on me, after the latter's death, a yearly pension of ten thousand thalers.

“Now my mother had firmly resolved not to over-persuade any of her daughters into marriage, but she spoke to me about the matter and asked me if I felt at all inclined to accept the offer. I replied that, if it were her wish, I would do it. Her answer was, ‘No, my child, you are too young for me to make you marry yet, but the offer is so splendid a one that I cannot refuse it without having placed the question before you. You must reflect by yourself whether you in any case could marry Goethe.’ I replied, ‘I do not need any time to reflect. I am very fond of Goethe, as I would be of a father, and if he stood quite alone and I thought I could be helpful to him I would accept him. He has, however, through his son, who has married and lives in the house with him, a family whose place I should be usurping if I went there. He doesn't need me, and the separation from mother, sister and grandparents would be very hard for me to bear. I have no desire to marry.’ So was it left. Goethe himself never spoke of the matter either to my mother or to me,

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

though he was wont to call me his darling or, more often, his dear little daughter.

"In 1823 we were with him only a short time in Marienbad, as my mother had to use Carlsbad. But Goethe came to us for days at a time, lived in the same house with us and always had breakfast and dinner with us. In the evenings one of us would take turns in reading aloud, all except my sister Amelie, who resolutely refused to share in this and who, as she was very lively, teased Goethe instead. He was in Carlsbad with us on his birthday and, since my mother perceived that he did not wish to let us know it was his birthday, she forbade us to mention it. The day before Goethe had said that he very much wished we would go with him to Elbogen early, that day, and be his guests, as he so many times had been ours. Mother accepted, prepared her little cakes, and when Goethe came down early (about seven o'clock) to breakfast there at his place was a pretty cup around which was an ivy wreath. After he had observed it for a while Goethe turned to my mother and said, 'Why the pretty cup?' 'That you may be reminded of our friendship,' she answered; 'ivy is always the emblem of friendship.' Goethe reached Mother his hand. 'How pretty,' he said; 'it shall always be a precious souvenir to me.' Soon we set out and Goethe was very gay the whole

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

day long, relating to us many incidents connected with his earlier visits to Carlsbad and pointing out to us objects of interest in Elbogen. When dinner-time came we found that he had already sent his man out with everything fitting to a feast. Mother, however, had brought with us a beautiful cake, a veritable birthday cake, and two bottles of old Rhine wine, which Goethe especially loved. This, also, stood on the table and Goethe immediately observed it. 'What a handsome cake!' he said. 'I had to bring something for the dinner,' Mother answered quietly, 'and so I chose cake and wine of which you are so fond.' 'Thoughtful friend!' he answered. 'But how about this beautiful glass upon which I see your name and the names of the dear children?' Again Mother answered, 'We wished not to be forgotten, and you shall have it to remember us and this pleasant occasion always.' Goethe laughed, thanked her and was gayer than ever.

"When dinner was over his man brought him a great package of letters, about which he remarked, after reading them, 'How kind and friendly people are!' expecting that we would question him. But we did not. So we all went, in high spirits, back to Carlsbad.

"Already from a distance we saw on the lawn before the house a lot of people waiting for us with

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

music. As soon as we got out of the carriage Goethe was surrounded. Mother beckoned to us, said good night to Goethe and went in and upstairs with us. Since it was already late we did not see Goethe again until the next day, when his first question to us was, 'You knew, didn't you, that yesterday was my birthday?' Mother replied, 'How should I not, since you couldn't prevent the fact's being printed?' Laughing heartily he thereupon exclaimed, 'We'll have to christen it the day of the open secret,' and such he always called it afterwards in his letters.

"I can only say again what I have already said often: that they were delightful experiences which we in those days enjoyed with Goethe, and the correspondence which he, for a long time, kept up with my mother showed that he, too, so regarded them. I could say much more about all this," Ulrike's narrative concludes, "but I think I have already said enough."

The lady's last word on the matter is the reiteration that there was no love-bond but only pleasant friendship between her and Goethe. On her side this was probably true, but that Goethe took the thing exceedingly hard we very well know. After the poet's death Ulrike seems to have grown yearly more and more devoted to him, for she

THE POET'S LAST LOVE

kept carefully the many little trifles he had given her and his portrait always occupied a place of honour in the sleeping room of her castle, Teschib-litz. Shortly before her death at the great age of ninety-six, feeling her end to be at hand, she bade her servant bring her a package of letters obviously from Goethe, though no one knew what their contents were. These she burned on a silver platter, causing their ashes to be then enclosed in a silver urn and giving orders that this priceless memorial should be placed with her in the casket, — which was done.

So we leave the story of Goethe's last love, adding only that Ulrike von Levetzow, like most of the other women whom this man singled out for special attention, was a creature of very fine and very strong character. It is said that, even when well along in the nineties, she would not be helped by any of her attendants, always bearing herself upright and remarking, "The body must be subservient and secondary to the Will and the Spirit within us." When she was a mere slip of a girl this strong soul of hers spoke through her clear blue eyes, and the soul of Goethe, which knew not age, quickened in response.

Most of the biographers deprecate this episode, but to me it does not seem necessary to take an

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

apologetic tone because Goethe when a very old man loved this very charming young girl. On the contrary, I find it highly fitting that his life-story should close with this little romance. Does not his greatest poem assert in its closing lines that

“The Woman-Soul leadeth us
Upward and on!”

CHAPTER XVII

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

GOETHE, aged twenty-six, arrived in Weimar on November 7, 1775. His coming marked the beginning of an epoch in the history of the town, for what Frederick the Great had done for Berlin he proceeded to do for this obscure capital of an insignificant little Duchy. After he had been in residence five years he wrote about the place a couplet to which his own subsequent career there lends a deepened truth:

“ O Weimar, dir fiel ein besonderes Los!
Wie Bethlehem in Juda, klein und gross.”¹

He was thinking of Anna Amalia and Karl August as he penned these lines, but we, as we quote them, think only of him.

For to-day, as in his prime at Weimar, Goethe pervades the place. Pictures of him are in every shop window, the houses with which his name is connected are reverently visited by hundreds of pilgrims each

¹ “ O Weimar, thine was a wonderful fate,
Like Judah's Bethlehem small and great.”

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

year, and always on his birthday there is a celebration which has the effect of keeping the rising generation fully informed as to the march of events in his life. Perhaps, therefore, we would do as well to take Weimar to-day in its relation to Goethe as to try to recreate in our fancy the dull little place into which Karl August succeeded in corralling so much of grace and genius. It is just as truly now a "city of Goethe" as it was when the poet, grown to be an old man, drew to his side, as with a magnet, all the clever youngsters of his time.

Thackeray, who later satirized the little Court as Pumpnickel in *Vanity Fair*,¹ was one of the clever youngsters who had been made welcome by the reigning powers and by the great Goethe. Mrs. Ritchie records that, writing from Weimar, July 31, 1830, her father said of the fascinating little town, "There is a capital library which is open to me; an excellent theatre which costs a shilling per night; and a charming *petite société* which costs nothing. Goethe, the great lion of Weimar, I have not seen, but his daughter-in-law has promised to introduce me." This promise was, in due time, fulfilled, with the result that Thackeray was able to write Lewes,

¹ The *Erbprinz*, where Joseph Sedley put up, is still the rival of the *Elephant*, at which Rebecca, then "Madame de Raudon," stopped.

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

when the latter begged him for some reminiscences of Weimar:

"In 1831, though he had retired from the world, Goethe would nevertheless very kindly receive strangers. His daughter-in-law's tea-table was always spread for us. We passed hour after hour there and night after night with the pleasantest talk and music. We read over endless novels and poems in French, English and German.

"Goethe remained in his private apartments, where only a very few privileged persons were admitted; but he liked to know all that was happening and interested himself about all strangers. Whenever a countenance struck his fancy, there was an artist settled in Weimar who made a portrait of it. Goethe had quite a gallery of heads in black and white, taken by this painter. His house was all over pictures, drawings, casts, statues and medals.

"Of course I remember very well the perturbation of spirit with which, as a lad of nineteen, I received the long-expected information that the Herr Geheimrath would see me on such a morning. This notable audience took place in a little ante-chamber of his private apartments, covered all round with antique casts and bas-reliefs. He was habited in a long gray or drab redingote, with a white neckcloth and a red ribbon in his buttonhole. He kept his hands

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

behind his back, just as in Rauch's statuette. His complexion was very bright, clear and rosy. His eyes extraordinarily dark, piercing and brilliant. I felt quite afraid before them. . . . I fancied Goethe must have been still more handsome as an old man than even in the days of his youth. His voice was very rich and sweet. He asked me questions about myself which I answered as best I could. I recollect that I was at first astonished and then somewhat relieved when I found that he spoke French with a good accent.

" I saw him but three times. Once walking in the garden of his house in the Frauenplan; once going to step into his chariot on a sunshiny day, wearing a cap and a cloak with a red collar. He was caressing at the time a beautiful little golden-haired granddaughter, over whose sweet, fair face the earth has long since closed, too. . . .

" Though his sun was setting, the sky round about him was calm and bright and that little Weimar illumed by it. In every one of those kind *salons* the talk was still of art and letters. The theatre, though possessing no very extraordinary actors, was still conducted with a noble intelligence and order. The actors read books and were men of letters and gentlemen, holding a not unkindly relationship with the *Adel*. At Court the conversation was exceedingly

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

friendly, simple and polished . . . and in the respect paid to the Patriarch of letters, there was something ennobling, I think, alike to the subject and the sovereign. With a five and twenty years' experience since those happy days of which I write, and an acquaintance with an immense variety of humankind, I think I have never seen a society more simple, charitable, courteous and gentlemanlike than that of the dear little Saxon city where the good Schiller and the great Goethe lived and lie buried."

Almost up to the time of his death, a year after Thackeray met him, Goethe was a prodigious worker. His last secretary, Kräuter, tells us that he was exceedingly systematic, too, devoting a certain time of each day to his correspondence, another to the arrangement of his papers and still another to the completion of writings begun long before. Sometimes he would move his study out into the open, and Kräuter records that, in one of the last years of his life, he said on a sunshiny morning: "Let us go into the park and do a bit of work there. It is a great pity such fine spring weather should not be enjoyed in the open." And so together they packed up books and papers and walked across to the wonderful park which Goethe had planned for the enjoyment of future generations in Weimar and for

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

which no visitor to the town to-day fails to call him blessed.

But though our poet liked the out-of-doors in warm weather, he could not bear even a breath of fresh air in his house in winter, and this fondness of his for overheated rooms — which dates from his years in Italy — was held to be a contributory cause of his death. For he sat constantly in a house so hot and close that he was always taking cold. Remembering his early love for sleeping out of doors one views with horrified astonishment the stuffy little chamber which he chose for a sleeping-room out of the many spacious apartments at his command, and in which he passed away on March 22, 1832, calling with his final breath for "More light, more light!"

The only relative with Goethe, when the end came, was his daughter-in-law, Ottilie (born von Pogwisch), who since her marriage to his son August, fifteen years before, had lived in the upper part of his house and presided at his table when guests were present. Johann Falk has given us a memorable picture of these two fast friends in the garden on a summer day studying the manners and customs of a snake. Ottilie, like most young women, did not enjoy the proximity of the reptile, but Goethe sat at a small garden table happily feeding with a quill the animal, which lay before him in a long-necked glass.

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

"The poet maintained that the snake knew him and raised its head to the edge of the glass as soon as he came in sight. 'What splendid, intelligent eyes!' said he. 'A great deal was half finished in this head, but the awkward, writhing body would not allow much to come of it.' . . . Near the glass which contained the snake lay some chrysalids of caterpillars, whose forthcoming Goethe was expecting. They showed a remarkable mobility, sensitive to the touch. Goethe took them from the table and watched them eagerly and attentively. Then he said to the boy, 'Carry them indoors; they will hardly come out to-day. It is too late now.' It was four in the afternoon.

"At this moment Frau von Goethe came into the garden. Goethe took the chrysalids out of the boy's hand and laid them again upon the table.

" 'How magnificent that fig-tree is, in leaf and blossom,' exclaimed the lady to us from a considerable distance as she advanced towards us along the middle walk of the garden. After greeting me and receiving my salutations in return she immediately asked me whether I had gone close to the fig-tree to admire it. 'We must not forget,' said she, at the same time addressing herself to Goethe, 'to have it matted next winter.' Goethe smiled and said to me, 'Do let yourself be shown the fig-tree and that

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

directly — or we shall have no peace this evening. It really is worth seeing, too, and deserves to be handsomely provided for.' . . .

" ' Well, for my part,' said Frau von Goethe, casting a side glance at the snake, ' I could not endure such a nasty thing as that near me, still less feed it with my own hands. Such a disagreeable creature! It makes me shudder to look at it.'

" ' Yet if the snake would but build himself a house and turn into a butterfly to oblige her, we should hear no more about " nasty things," ' retorted Goethe. ' Dear child, we can't all be butterflies nor fig-trees decked with flowers and fruit. Poor snake! They despise you! They should treat you better. How he looks at me! How he raises his head! Is it not as if he knew that I was taking his part? Poor thing, how he is pent up there!' . . .

" The servant then brought water and while Goethe was washing his hands, he said, ' That was Katz, the painter, whom you met as you came in; the sight of him is most agreeable and refreshing to me. He is exactly the same in every respect in Weimar as he was in the Villa Borghese. Every time I see him it is as if he brought a bit of the *dolce far niente* of the Roman atmosphere of art into my presence. . . . We here talk a great deal too much. I, for my part, should be glad to break myself of

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

talking altogether, and speak, like creative nature, only in pictures. Figure to yourself Nature, how she sits, as it were at a card-table, incessantly calling "*au double !*" *i. e.* exulting in what she has already won through every region of her operations; and thus plays on into infinitude. Animal, vegetable, mineral are continually setting up anew after some such fortunate throws; and who knows whether the whole race of man is anything more than some throw after a higher stake.'

"During this agreeable conversation, evening had closed in; and as it was grown too cool for the garden, we went upstairs into the sitting-room. Some time after, we were standing at the window. The sky was thick-sown with stars. The chords in Goethe's soul, which the open air of the garden and the works of nature had struck, still quivered, and during the whole evening their vibration did not cease. 'All is so vast,' said he to me, 'that an end, a cessation of existence is nowise to be thought of.' " . . .

At the Goethe house, in the centre of Weimar, it is of this man who stood at the window and contemplated the stars, of the poet with ripened experience who wrote the wonderful second book of *Faust*, that one chiefly thinks. For the house, now a Goethe National Museum, is rather too stately to

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

seem like a home, and only two rooms in it, the study and the little chamber in which the great man died, have about them intimate suggestions of the poet. The drawing-room, to be sure, is furnished just as it was when Goethe held his famous receptions there; and the "Juno room," — so called because it contains the colossal figure of the goddess which the poet brought home from Italy, — as well as the music-room with its piano upon which young Mendelssohn once performed, remain as he left them. But one does not feel him there; and one does feel him very distinctly when one pauses, in a tour of the house, at the study and his bedroom adjoining it.

The central object of every study is, of course, its writing-desk, in this case an ordinary deal table such as may be found in many a workingman's kitchen. Yet upon this common wooden table were written some of the most important works of this greatest of German authors! A few books of reference, some piles of proof-sheets neatly arranged, and a bust of Napoleon, — whom Goethe greatly admired, incumbent though it is held to be on all Germans to regard him with furious hatred, — make up the severely plain appointments of this very interesting apartment.

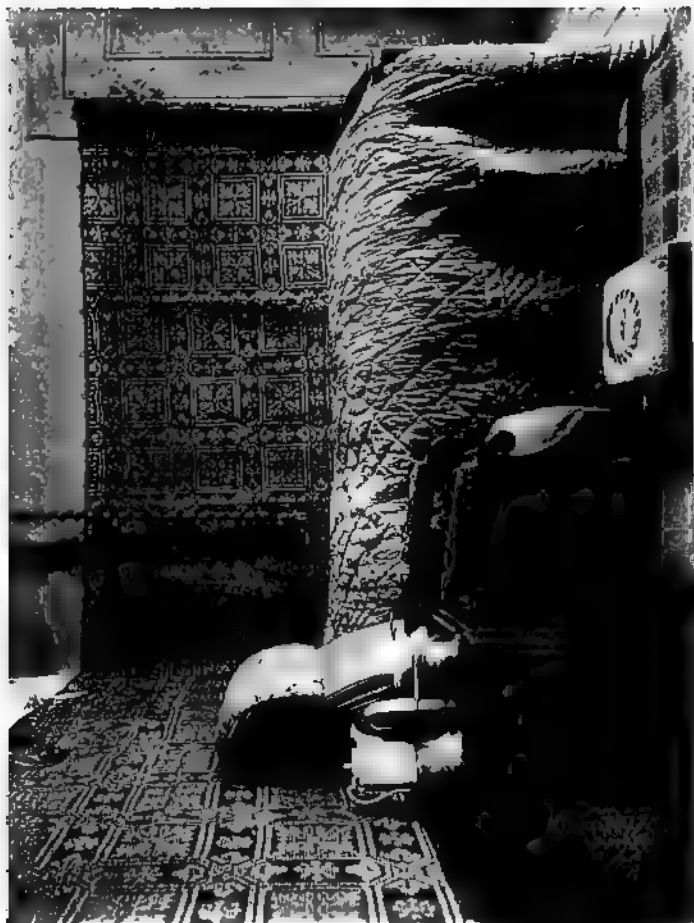
Connected with the study by a little door so low



GOETHE IN HIS STUDY.
From a drawing by Schmeller. See p. 431.



GOETHE AND FRITZ VON STEIN.
See p. 242.



Copyright, by Louis Held, Weimar.

ROOM IN WHICH GOETHE DIED.

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

that the poet, though not a tall man, must have had to stoop to pass through it, is the tiny room in which Goethe died and which, with affectionate reverence, has been left in every detail exactly as it was when he passed away. Beside the plain, narrow bed is an arm-chair in which he was sitting when he breathed his last, and near by is a small table containing a teacup and a bottle of medicine. A shaving-stand with a narrow mirror and a wash-stand with a basin, pitcher, soap-dish and sponge are the only other articles in the room. Though a fairly rich man at the time of his death, Goethe, in his personal belongings, seems to have been as close to the simple life as when he first set up housekeeping at Weimar in the bare little cottage across the Ilm which we associate with his salad days.

Happily this earlier home of the poet is also preserved, so that the visitor who prefers the red-blooded playfellow of the young Karl August to the aged Geheimrath, the lusty lover of Charlotte and Christiane to the writer of books on biology, may also have his loyalty quickened in a house intimately associated with Goethe. Particularly indeed does the spirit of the man seem to preside over the charming Garden-House in which he first took up his residence in the spring of 1776.

If one cares about this Goethe of high hopes and

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

deep sighs the place is of course highly interesting; but even if one only cares about gardens its memory is a joy forever. A certain German writer has wittily observed that his garden was the only love to which Goethe remained all his life true, offering the cynical explanation that trees, unlike women, grow as does a man himself. A truer saying would be that trees improve in looks as they take on years and that women do not. In any event Goethe loved this garden on the Ilm with a love that never changed. Of it he wrote:

“ Weit und schön ist die Welt, doch o wie dank ich dem
Himmel

Dass ein Gärtchen, beschränkt, zierlich mein eigen gehört!
Bringe mich wieder nach Hause! Was hat ein Gärtner
zu reisen?

Ehre bringt's ihm und Glück, wenn er sein Gärtchen
besorgt.”¹

To the Countess Stolberg he declared, joyfully, just after he had come into possession of this little property, “ I have a lovely garden on the banks of the Ilm, before which stretches out a beautiful meadow. There is an old house there which I shall

¹ “ Broad and lovely the world. Yet do I thank Thee, O Heaven,
That I a garden possess, howsoe'er modest its limits!
Let me now home again journey: what need has a gardener to
wander?
Contentment and honour are his so long as he tendeth his garden.”

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

have repaired. There, too, everything blossoms and all the birds sing." To-day it is as true as it was more than a century and a quarter ago, when the above lines were written, that this garden is a bit of Paradise. Bicycles and motor-cars rush by on the street which now divides its grounds from those of the adjacent park, but within its green hedge one thinks only of forest spaces and expects, just as Eckermann once said he always expected, that at any moment a stag or a doe may stand before one in the green silence. For, though this Garden-House and its grounds are only a five-minutes walk from the abode of many men, it seems to be leagues removed from every habitation. To Goethe it particularly appealed because of its quietness and its air of remoteness. He felt himself here quite apart from, quite outside the town, and yet he was so near to it all that, in winter, he could see through the trees the house of his beloved Frau von Stein and, towering behind that modest residence, the palace of his friend, Karl August. When (in 1778) the Borkenhäuschen¹ (little Birch-Bark House) added itself to the neighbourhood Goethe's privacy was only a shade less pronounced. For he was glad to have Karl

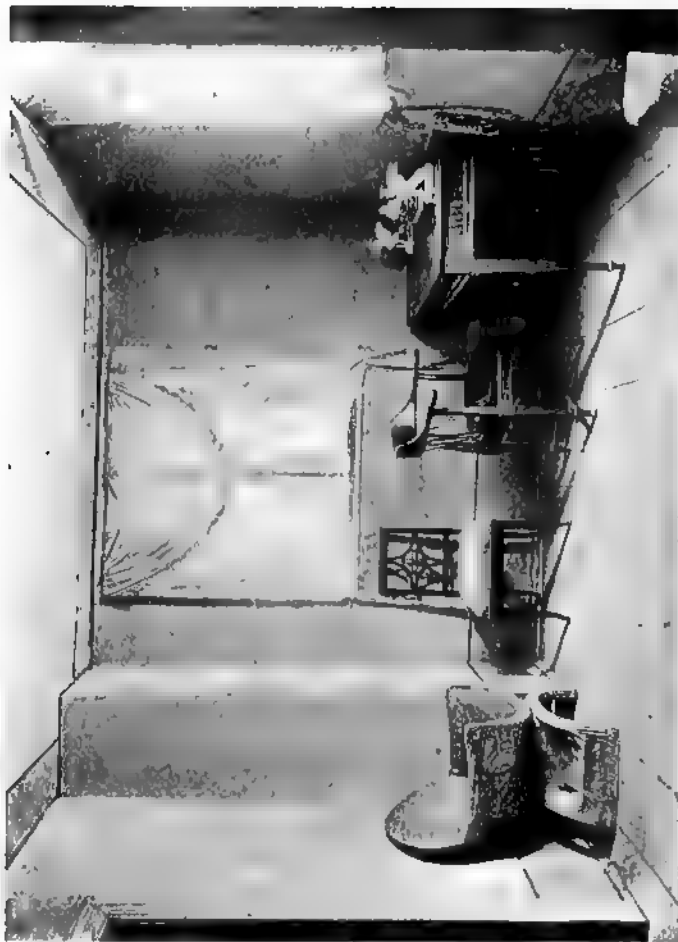
¹This was run up in three days and nights by order of Goethe that there might be an easily accessible shelter against rain for a fête arranged (in 1778) in honour of the Duchess Louise.

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

August sleep for an occasional night in this near-by hut and call over to him at midnight to come out and bathe in the limpid waters of the Ilm.

Summer and winter for seven years Goethe lived happily in the Garden-House, — with its five rooms and a kitchen, — whose narrow walls make one wonder greatly that he could here be content. The Frankfort home which he had left is a palace compared to this little box; and the large house on the Frauenplan in which he later took up his residence each winter an imposing and spacious mansion. Yet he loved the little place dearly, writing to Frau von Stein when, to please her and the Duke, he moved into town, "My soul yearns for the little home I have left as did Melusine for that one of hers to which she might not return. How much I have lost in removing from that peaceful refuge! It was the second thread which held me [to Weimar]; now you alone hold me." Yet it was really to the garden rather than to the house that his heart so tenderly clung. Even in February¹ he could write to his friends from a warm corner outside there, and as soon as spring broke he would be seen busying himself day after day with the trees and plants that still make the

¹ It is interesting to note that his last visit to the Garden-House was, also, in February, — that of the year 1832.



Copyright by Louis Hag, Weimar.

INTERIOR OF GOETHE'S GARDEN - HOUSE.
Showing curtains embroidered by Frau von Stein.



Copyright by Louis Held, Weimar.

SCHILLER HOUSE.

Showing room in which Goethe's brother-in-law died.

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

place so beautiful. Lindens, oaks, elms, chestnuts, and pines here gave grateful shade, fairly crowding at length the little house which there raised its modest roof. "Next spring I really must trim them," Goethe wrote in 1799, "for the trees and shrubs which I planted more than twenty years ago have now taken away light and air from the house and the grounds. So it often happens that our own wishes grow over our heads!" A whole quarter of a century later he told Eckermann with pride that the foliage of these trees, which he had himself planted, was so thick that the strongest sun could not pierce them. "I can sit here comfortably at my table on the warmest summer days," he continued, "while over the adjacent meadow and the Park, just across, there reigns a stillness such as that in which the ancients were wont to say 'Pan sleeps.'"

In the early years of the Garden-House the place was dedicated to Charlotte von Stein, and even to-day her spirit seems to hover over this spot as over no other connected with Goethe. There, on the windows, hang the curtains she embroidered, with her own hands, for her friend's "best room," and there too stands the inscription beginning "Hier in stille gedachte der Liebender seiner Geliebten" which the poet caused to be engraved on stone and placed near the seats which they were

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

wont to use in summer, out under the trees. Frau von Stein had a key to the garden-gate and often came with one of her children to spend a quiet afternoon there. Karl August, Anna Amalia and Herder were other favoured friends who occasionally penetrated to this fastness of the poet which, according to Wieland, was very effectually barred by the little Ilm from the intrusions of the unwelcome. "There is no chance of getting at Goethe over there," he once half-jokingly wrote, "for he has barricaded nearly all the approaches. To be sure he has allowed three or four bridges to be made over the Ilm, but only God knows why, for they are fitted with gates which I always find closed when I want to go over to him. Inasmuch as there is no way of reaching him — except with a train of artillery or a band of men to chop down the gates — one is forced to abandon the adventure."

The sole other occupant of the Garden-House, beside the poet, was the faithful Philip Seidel, who performed housewifely miracles in the kitchen downstairs in the intervals when he was not occupied in the delivery of letters and gifts to the Frau von Stein. Sometimes Karl August spent the night on the narrow sofa, after the two young men had been talking earnestly and late of the improvements they planned for Weimar. Chief of these and a thing

WEIMAR, THE CITY OF GOETHE

which every visitor to the town hugely enjoys is the lovely park through which the Ilm flows sluggishly. For hardly had Goethe taken possession of his own goodly heritage in the way of a garden when he began to plan that future generations should enjoy in a public park just such beauty as was now his. The result is the loveliest spot one can imagine, a place which seems miles removed from city sights and sounds, and in which Nature appears to have done all — so skilfully has man's share in making its beauty been concealed. One very interesting feature of the Park is the "Römische Haus," — built for Karl August under Goethe's direction, towards the end of the eighteenth century and reached from the river level by steps upon which are engraved the following graceful lines by Goethe:

"Die ihr Felsen und Bäume bewohnet, o heilsame Nymphen,
Gebet Jeglichem gern, was er im stillen begehrt!
Schaffet dem Traurigen Trost, dem Zweifelhaften Belehrung,
Und dem Liebenden gönnt, dass ihm begegne sein Glück!
Denn euch gaben die Götter was sie den Menschen versagten:
Jeglichem, der euch vertraut, tröstlich und hilfreich zu sein."¹

¹ "O ye beneficent Nymphs, who inhabit the trees and the caverns,
Grant unto everyone, gladly, what he in his inmost soul longs for.
Unto the sad vouchsafe comfort, gird the doubting with quickening
faith,
And to the lover in kindness give swiftly the love he desires.
For you by the gods are endowed with a grace they to men have
denied:
The power to be helpful to all who trustfully ask for your help."

GOETHE AND HIS WOMAN FRIENDS

Goethe's associations with Ettersburg, Tiefurt, Belvedere and the Wittumspalais have all been referred to when these places were being described, but it is worth while to observe here in passing that the mere mention of the poet's name by guides taking parties through these houses always evokes a quickened interest on the part of visitors. In a very real sense Goethe is the *genius loci* of every Weimar show-place. To be sure, Schiller stands beside him in the monument before the Theatre (with which they were together associated), but visitors to Schiller's home are much less numerous than to the Goethe houses, and it is to view Goethe's grave — not because Schiller, also, is buried there — that thousands of Germans and out-landers annually seek out the Fürstengruft, where, in company with the Grand Duke Karl August and many of his descendants, repose the remains of the two great poets, who were also warm friends. Karl August had expressed the wish to lie, after death, between Goethe and Schiller, but this democratic desire rather scandalized Germany and the Fürstengruft is the resulting compromise. The German mind of our own day is much impressed that the Grand Duke's desire has been even thus far realized. A certain minor poet has exclaimed:



FURSTENGRUFT, WHERE GOETHE AND SCHILLER LIE BURIED,
BESIDE KARL AUGUST.



STEPS LEADING TO THE "RÖMISCHE HAUS" IN WEIMAR'S PARK.
Showing Goethe inscription.

